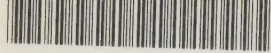




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# Grotesques





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# Grotesques

*and Other Reflections on  
Art and the Theatre*

*By*

MARY CASS CANFIELD

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TO  
MY MOTHER

GROTESQUES

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# ECHOES

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# Grotesques

*& Other Reflections*



## GROTESQUES

ON the obverse of the medal of idealism is stamped the grotesque. Through the whole kingdom of art the grotesque follows on the heels of the ordered like a dark hound at the side of Artemis.

The tortured and tortuous demons of Gothic doorways, Goya's saturnalian figures or Stravinsky's dissonances, are evidence that in every age there has existed in the souls of artists an undying impulse toward grotesque creation. The traditional shapes of æsthetic fancy are grotesque. Fauns, centaurs, Pegasus, and Medusa range the olive-grey slopes of Greece, disturbing the tanned normality of resting shepherds; northern woods are full of elves

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## GROTESQUES

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and witches, flitting like unwholesome night birds; Croquemitaine, bogy of little children, grimly stalks the neat Brittany orchards; and the meadows of England are the stamping ground of the unicorn, its copses conceal a grinning, misshapen Puck, while giants hurl rocks at one another in Cornwall, and dragons breathe fire through the dangerous, secret verdure of Wales. Ghosts are universal, and as for the devil, he has since his conception been the lay figure on which the grotesque imagination has hung its most formidable dreams.

China and India give plastic form to the monstrous; Leonardo da Vinci fills sketch-books with beasts never seen on land or sea and faces that haunt us by their inordinate greeds and wild asymmetry; under the exquisite pattern of Aubrey Beardsley's black and white there peeps forth a horned, intangible horror.

The grotesque, in its most naïve aspect, springs from a primitive love and fear of the unknown—a shuddering lust for the impossible. Art, Janus-faced, is either a celebration of reality or an escape from it: the passion for



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## GROTESQUES

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life as it is of a Balzac, or the opalescent, prophetic reverie of a Shelley. The grotesque, then, in its own cross-grained way, falls into the second category and is a denial of reality; it is a denizen of that unreal world so necessary to those whose feet are bruised by the hard road of fact. There are humans who must find wings or perish; some will even take to bats' wings. The grotesque is a twisted, fog-ridden forest in that Never-Never-Land which is the home of those who find mortal flesh a prison.

Across this unbelievable realm of the grotesque falls the shadow of fear. It is part of man's unending search for sensation that he should thus build phantoms to pursue himself with, that he should assure to himself, in this way, the emotion of terror. There is a primordial cell in our brains which responds fearfully to the abnormal. Even while we experience a delicious shiver of pleasure at our fright, something cries out in us before the grotesque, like a child in a nightmare. We are inclined to shout, "This is not true!" so as to reassure ourselves. We may laugh at the

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## GROTESQUES

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“worm” in “Siegfried,” trailing his green cotton folds and gleaming his acetylene eyes with such amazingly German literalness, but we shall not restrain a quiver of nerves at his entrance, a shock at his noisy unnaturalness. And yet what a persistent attraction lies for us in the inharmonious, and how we shudder at and still pore over the diabolic deformity of a stone gargoyle, the livid attenuated saints of El Greco or the icily morbid fantasies of Edgar Allan Poe!

Apart from this primal terrifying intent of the grotesque, there is often in it a more civilized emotion—the sharp laughter of caricature. And here is an anomaly. For although the grotesque is an escape from the actual, in the sense of being an exaggeration, yet it is often but a heightening of external aspects—a tumultuous piling up and an exacerbation of all too familiar, distasteful fact. Leonardo’s pencil sketches, in which human beings subtly begin to resemble animals, discourse humorously concerning his contemporaries; the passers-by in the street, grasping old women, gluttonous old

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## GROTESQUES

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men, shrews, street boys, and sots. Caliban is perhaps at root only some earth-bound black-guard of the Elizabethan pothouse and Bottom a bumptious yokel at the Stratford fair. Dauter's clawing lawyers are so many violent footnotes on human cunning, avarice and hatred.

Although the grotesque may contain caricature, many caricatures do not reach the stature of true grotesque. Caricature per se is an intellectual feat, a physiological comment untouched by that preoccupation with pattern and rhythm which is the sine qua non of the plastic arts.

The true grotesque is a work of art. But a work of art with a dark taint on its birth. For we shall not look long at the grotesque without realizing that there is in it something spiritually ominous, a quality in it more profound than its strangeness or its humour. For what reason, after all, does the artist, the striver after the ideal, the lover, one would have thought, of the proportioned and the lovely, create the distorted and the unsightly?

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## GROTESQUES

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What obscure passion is working in him, what denatured instinct? He is foiling us in our search for the restfully ordered, for some deep and original harmony. Is it fanciful to believe that the grotesque is an expression of pain, of some tragic uneasiness in the soul, which finds relief in negation? Shakespeare gave Titania an ass for a lover; did not this spring from some living hatred of some living Titania?

A number of present-day artists patiently evolve the inharmonious, using fine material and fine energy in the effort. The lucid ancients made rigid division between the lovely and the grotesque, expressing both with equal care and detachment. The moderns, more impatient and more subjective, weave the grotesque, often unconsciously one would say, into their fabrics, some more richly than others, some to that point of perturbing excess which arouses cries of "Degenerate" or "Faker", and indignation meetings among lovers of safety.

Lovers of safety will not approve the grotesque, for there is no safety in imagination.

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## GROTESQUES

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If the song of the imagination is the lovely, the grotesque is its cry of despair.

And the damned grotesques  
Made arabesques  
Like wind upon the sand.

Grotesques are damned. Yet their creation is perhaps the safety valve of the artistic temperament. The surplus of grotesque feeling among modern artists of all nationalities and all dimensions—Stravinsky, Jacob Epstein, Augustus John, Jean Cocteau, Mestrovic, James Joyce, Brancusi, Picasso, Yvette Guilbert—and among us, Elie Nadelman, Arthur B. Davies, Eugene O'Neill, Guy Pène du Bois, Hunt Diederich, Amy Lowell, Henry Clews, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Gaston Lachaise, Edgar Varese, Sherwood Anderson, Charlie Chaplin—the list can be almost infinitely prolonged—does it not spring from a too long endured æsthetic disappointment, some starvation of the artist's soul among the aridities of materialism and the distracting hideousness of a machine-driven civilization?

And in these moderns do we not find that not only subject matter but method has become grotesque, and we have the deliberately ugly imagery of Amy Lowell or E. E. Cummings and the distortions of Picasso and Brancusi, whereas in Poe's stories of Beardsley's drawings an unholy content was at least clothed in holy form? The perverse parade of grotesque emotion which we observe in contemporary art deserves the attention of sociologists. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. The artist is ill. Life is too literal and he takes to his fancy. Life is too pervasively discordant and so his fancy does not soar, does not sanely and safely create beautiful rhythms, but becomes infected with unrest, turns ape to the actual, is a rebellious slave to what it would be free from.

Humour is the balancing pole with which the distraught spirit rights itself. In the grotesque, humour is pushed to the point of frenzy. The grotesque is the artist's revenge upon what has hurt him too deeply. First evolved out of man's primitive sense of fear and thirst for the impossible, it has become in its later, more



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## GROTESQUES

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sophisticated form, a wild gesture, torn from the creator by the extremity of his suffering. It is as painful and intimate as a wound. We shrink from its desperate underscoring of the mediocre and the despicable, conscious that this is a broken gesture, the result of a man's failure to transcend his bitterness. The greater artist sublimates beyond this æsthetic cynicism into a creative act of faith. Michelangelo, Beethoven, Whitman—these conquered the temptation to mockery, which is a strong one to intense temperaments, and out of their tried courage wove visions that are part of the hope of humanity. The lesser artist, with a sensitiveness too keen, too proud, too easily jangled, and a less sublime self-control, abandons himself to negation as a man takes to drink. The grotesque is an evasion and therefore a defeat. We are shocked at it, as at a dissipation; we pity its creator. For it is the expression of a man's frustrated imaginations, of his subconscious obsessions; it is his fallen angel's denial of any lasting beauty; it is his final, caustic, vanquished laugh at reality.

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## MRS. ASQUITH, IN PERSON

MRS. ASQUITH, in her second New York lecture, talked a good deal about butlers. True, they were not her main topic—considerable ingenuity would have been necessary in order to stick a pin through her main topic and nail it firmly to a cork—but they seemed to weave in and out, a sort of *leitmotif* through her musings.

In connection with Lord Spencer, “of whom you know little in America,” she told an anecdote about her own butler; of Lord Spencer we learned little more than we already knew or did not know; he was but the dramatic antagonist, the verbal sparring partner, the foil for Mrs. Asquith’s butler.

With the artful accuracy of a Robert W. Chambers, Mrs. Asquith consistently and kindly introduced us to the appurtenances of fashion—servants, broughams, town houses, yachts, and even kings.

To those of us who were perhaps annoyingly serious-minded, the exhibition was puzzling. We wondered a little just what Mrs. Asquith thought she was offering.

"I stopped at Lady Islington's for tea," she told us. And we put our noses to the ground and were off at full cry on the scent of a significant personality or incident. But, no, it seemed we were wrong; we were on a false trail. Nothing more was forthcoming, and we realized how dull we were not to have seen before that Lady Islington was brought in as part of the scenery.

"I will tell you about my husband," said Mrs. Asquith, and then proceeded to relate how she devised a costume for him to wear at a ducal fancy-dress ball.

"And Lord Tennyson"—for Lord T. she economically dove back into her Autobiography, and we got the now familiar tale of how she sat on the poet's knee, mingled with explanations as to the titles and names of Tennyson's two sons, and which one was her great friend.

"I will also speak of Lord Kitchener." Here

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## GROTESQUES

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Mrs. Asquith made an heroic attempt at an objective description and a judgment; the description lacked novelty; the sentence on Kitchener's ability was the effortless echo of Downing Street chit-chat about munition providing, heard over governmental teacups.

Mrs. Asquith's performance was childish, impertinent, and oddly pathetic. Her mental disconnection astounded and distressed one; her talk had the animated lack of continuity of a conversation at a garden party. One suspects that her mind is irrevocably disintegrated by years of the impromptu adequacy demanded by every kind of a party. That she should plan to regale the American public with cold roast gossip, mention of "my sister, a very great artist, a cripple, who has lived in India," descriptions of her stepson's bravery and her daughter's infant wit, will seem to us a colossal, an almost insane effrontery unless we remember what are her circumstances in England. She has the brisk presumption, possible only to the privileged class of a country where snobbishness, in spite of railroad strikes, exists

with something of that magnificent *naïveté* it possessed at the court of Louis XIV. Saint Simon did not check up jewelled orders and kingly salutations with a greater fervour than that with which Mrs. Asquith registers titles and motor cars.

Her lack of perception, her want of humour, her inability to forget herself, to learn or absorb from other minds, to concentrate, to analyze, to make interesting deductions, have been forgiven her, one divines, in favor of her vitality, her unflagging assurance, and her position.

And now we come to the pathos which hovers about her.

"You would not think me nervous, perhaps, but I am," she said as she paced up and down the stage. Nervous, not in a defective, but in a positive, highly charged way is exactly what one would think Mrs. Asquith. It is precisely her excessive nervous equipment which commands attention; she has the irritable eccentricity of gesture of a Mary Garden. She is what the French call an original. The term

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## GROTESQUES

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does not imply distinction of intellect, but a certain temperamental uniqueness. Mrs. Asquith's nervous radiations are peculiar; she has the restless resiliency of a young boy, and incidentally she has his scattered enthusiasms and his uneducated heart. More, she possesses a quick dramatic instinct, an inclination to mimicry almost grotesque in its intensity, which reminds one of Yvette Guilbert. But this fearless theatrical quality is her only firework, and her pathos lies in her instinctive recognition of the necessity for turning the current on full tilt if she is to be a success.

As she proceeded through her lecture the sheer physical effort she made aroused in one the alarmed, uncomfortable pity which only the tight-rope walker had so far evoked.

America is notoriously kind and resents far too few things. One suspects that the woman who, at Mrs. Asquith's first lecture, called out that she wanted her money back was a Sinn Feiner. Mrs. Asquith perhaps made dollars in the United States and was probably treated politely.



A certain class of people were doubtless charmed by her dukes, her dinner parties, and her royal secretaries; they revelled, it may be, in her easy personalities; they liked her incidental sentimentality about the war; they scarcely resented the unconcerned inconsequence of her single-minded egotism. Lastly they were not strangely shocked by the anomaly of watching an apparently highly organized human being—a woman with an eager, finely-drawn face—presenting them with inchoate masses of mingled vulgarity and triviality. But after all, rather unfortunately for Mrs. Asquith, the average life in America is adventurously active enough not to possess the restricted monotone which longs for just her particular kind of glamour.

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## APHRODITE—B. C. 400

BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

SHE tilted her head gently to one side and looked a little beyond me with an expression half humorous, half consciously wistful. She had just been quoting a bit of Edgar Lee Masters. The savour of modern comment was on her lips; its intensity made up of curiosity; its bravado made up of restless humour; its hard melancholy made up of scepticism. Perhaps it was an imaged love poem that she had been reading me, something which made her smile with pleasure at its pale, disingenuous beauty; or, again, it might have been some angular caricature, so full of bitterness that the tears hovered in her eyes.

It was difficult to know what she was thinking.

She was very lovely. The fresh living curves of her brow and cheek were modelled with the

utmost delicacy, and thought made only the subtlest ripples of shadow across her white face, scarcely attenuating its perfect physical beauty. There was about her an atmosphere of independence which seemed to find its expression in the sweep of her hair to the top of her head, while the ends parted and fell in soft curls, curiously reminiscent of the natural surging contours of sea waves. Freedom was in this hair of hers, in the straight pillar of her neck, in the resolute egoism of her lips. If she did not already have the vote, one felt that she was going to have it. Her method of obtaining it, however, would be far from a militant one. Bombs, hatpins, and torches were not her weapons, neither fiery arguments; she was more fatally and simply armed with charm.

Yes, the vote was hers. And yet, somehow, one felt it had ceased to mean much to her. She had once seen it in the far distance as a glowing symbol of equality in responsibility—a thing to be striven for. But then something had happened to her. She had been bold enough, or perhaps idle enough, to look beyond

practical things, beyond practical affairs and responsibilities. She had flung down a metaphysical gauntlet and required of life an explanation. She had dared ask questions of the silent Sphinx. What her experience had been, she was too lazy, perhaps too feminine and uncreative, ever to want to reveal. The light of her lonely intellectual and spiritual wanderings lay behind her charming, shadowed eyes. Her subtle glance told no stories and made no confessions. It looked dreamily by me in a vague, affectionate way, while her mouth smiled carelessly, as if softly mocking at some too earnest pain.

She held between the world and herself the shining shield of a determined objectivity. To pierce behind the brilliant reserve of such a woman of the world required penetration, but with patience one could perhaps divine a little of her spiritual history. One guessed that at fifteen she had read Darwin and Huxley and Herbert Spencer, and had renounced prayer books, angels, and immortality with a sense of enormous adventure. After that, naked and

free, she had wandered far afield into Plato and Nietzsche, Aristotle and Kant. Then suddenly and quite unexpectedly she had shuddered to feel herself alone with her reason, and turned to Bergson and William James, attracted by the cheerful possibilities offered by modern psychologists. But it was only to become conscious that, after all, these calm experimentalists offered her no definite faith, only the most generous and discreetly formulated of plausibilities. Still seeking, almost tremblingly as she told herself in moments of self-contempt, for a kind land in which she might find rest, she had grasped the hands of the poets, Maeterlinck and Tagore, and followed the saints, Buddha and Christ. Purged of theology, the Sermon on the Mount could not but appeal to her. The sublime poetry of it—the thought of “mansions in heaven”—made her smile tenderly as one would at a little child. But her perfect sense of proportion made her always see over and around things; and while the beauty of such imaginings stirred her, and fed a certain passionate hunger in her for cer-

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## GROTESQUES

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tainty, she could never become the servant of a philosophy in which hard facts, the scientific phenomena of the universe, were either disregarded or directly denied.

And so, finally, she had given up the great search, not without a slight sense of dishonourable defeat, and life now came to her day after day only as a pageant upon which it was best to gaze with serene, half-kind, half-amused eyes. She had once been a fierce idealist; she had wanted all or nothing, oblivious of the fact that life consists of half portions. Now she was outwardly taking things as they were, although in her inner self she told herself proudly that she took nothing; that, spiritually, she was a self-sufficient solitary.

But there were times when her endurance gave way and she cried out in her solitude. Then she would go into churches and kneel down, and perhaps feel a mystic thrill, only to have her reason—her unconquerable reason—remind her that her emotion came from overwrought nerves and the effect on her senses of semi-darkness and the smell of incense. Some-



times she would watch a great sunset. One in particular she remembered, red and gold over the Ægean Islands. She had stood long in the October evening, hoping to discern a mystery behind its glory. But here again Beauty had been the only message that reached her, and so to Beauty she had dedicated her soul.

She felt that for her the life of the senses was the only sincere one; to be a refined materialist was to be truly herself. And, therefore, near her always were beautiful objects, and her eyes lingered on rare flowers and carved bowls and the exquisite coloured plumage of fantastic birds. Many people would have called her heartless; she was only too clever and too true to her own cleverness. Others would have thought her immoral; she was only too infinitely complicated to harbour a prejudice or a conviction. She relieved suffering because it was a horror, a disfigurement on the face of the earth. In her dark, hidden hours she had cursed the creator of pain. But now, without searching for its cause, she pitied ugliness of soul or body, and did not want it near her.

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## GROTESQUES

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Her wisdom, acquired in dead days of anguish, was hard and unshakable. Human art and human love she knew to be the two great salvations, the two great avenues of escape from barren and desolate fields of speculation. Here analysis was halted, and self-torture ceased. Here one stopped dissecting the gold of sunshine. Here was passionate completion and an escape from the wearying intellectual necessity for looking beyond. Soul and senses were finally one; loneliness ended, and vision could be shared. At last, one met with others on mountain tops.

Such was the record of her inner life, and such her ultimate philosophy. But she did not deign to illumine the outside world concerning these things. Those who felt the cold and keen rapier of her intelligence never guessed what hidden fires of suffering had tempered her mind into steel. To appeal for sympathy would have seemed to her pure sentimentality, a combination of weakness and stupidity. Her lovers might be charmed by a hidden melancholy in her, but she would keep its secret essence from

their knowledge, and sadness would only hover about her as a sweet perfume hovers about a rose. As I looked at her I knew that to those around her she had resolutely made herself the goddess of the breathing and the actual, of dangerous earthly beauty. Subtly and irresistibly she spoke of the tangible. She had hushed her hungry soul to sleep with the music of viols, and drugged it into silence with spiced wines. There was about her the strange pathos of what is consciously ephemeral, and something of its soft and cruel intensity. Dreamily she would pluck any flower she chose, only to let it drop when its scent or its colour should pall. Her last faith was a belief in the moment, and inexorably she held out the finite in her hand. She smiled beyond me, half bored, half captivated. Perhaps she looked, idly and yet deeply, at some bright-haired boy, or gazed with gently pleased sensibility at the carefully wrought heart's tissue of an artist.

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## D'ANNUNZIO'S HOUSE

ON a spring afternoon, some years ago, we set out to visit the house of Gabriele d'Annunzio at Settignano, near Florence. The rumour went that Italy's greatest living man of letters was bankrupt. At any rate, the villa in which so much of his work had been done was thrown open to the public for a few days before the date on which the whole estate, including the valuable furniture and the art collection, was to be put up at auction.

All Florence flew to Settignano; ladies of title—friends, perhaps, of the poet—elbowed rich bourgeois; and, easily recognizable by their business-like air and their notebooks, dealers hovered about the premises like so many birds of prey. The villa, a low grey building, covered with creepers and half hidden by shrubbery, faced towards Florence, which lay in the valley below. Near the house were the stables where (these, too, for sale) were kept

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## D'ANNUNZIO'S HOUSE

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d'Annunzio's forty dogs and the famous white horse upon which he roamed the Tuscan lanes.

While the crowd gradually melted away, it was pleasant to explore the garden, so green and still in the warm sunlight, and sending up a heady smell of lemon blossoms and the deep, dusty tang of box. Presently, when the last limousine had honked its way down the high-walled road to the Arno, one ventured into the deserted house. Immediately the sparkling afternoon was blotted out. The narrow entrance hall was semidark; faintly, with a chill reminiscence of stone churches in its fragrance, incense hung on the air.

There were endless small rooms on the lower floor, literally crowded with what the catalogue of the sale correctly called "objects of art." Oak tables, majolica vases, bronzes, ivories, bits of old silk, high-backed Renaissance chairs, tapestries hidden behind wooden madonnas, early Umbrian crucifixions in bright greens and reds, and casts from the antique were heaped pell-mell. The villa seemed half a church, half a museum. The windows were diamond-

paned, and made of an opaque glass which shut out the smiling spring and let in an unearthly glow. In the centre of each casement showed the poet's device, worked in a coloured medallion: a laurel wreath with a scroll beneath, on which one made out the legend, "*Per non dormire*"—"So as not to sleep."

Here, one felt, was a key to the man—exhibiting as it did a consciousness of achievement, somewhat blatant and ridiculous to one's well-bred Anglo-Saxon mind, but a consciousness tempered by a sense of *noblesse oblige*, a yearning towards further accomplishment, which proved itself to be real and found fine expression during the war.

Like the other apartments, the poet's bedroom, which was also on the ground floor, displayed a bewildering medley of furnishings. A curious, circular *prie-dieu* stood before the window; the walls were made up of odd panels carved in disparate designs which were almost indistinguishable in the half light. At the bottom of the canopied bed, facing towards the pillow, stood a gigantic shape, grotesque and ter-

rifyingly still. Its head almost touched the low ceiling. In the bronze face were set white eyeballs with inky pupils; one arm, crooked at the elbow, stretched forward in an unexplainable gesture; stiff and massive, dressed in a robe the rigid folds of which fell to its feet, the form seemed to have no sex and no humanity—but to be some unknown deity—some grim representation of Fate, perhaps, holding in its outstretched hand the destiny of a man, with a gesture both indifferent and relentless. On closer examination it proved, after all, to be only a replica of the Charioteer of Delphi, he who stands so calmly at the top of that long flight of stairs in the Louvre. But his mystery was heightened here in the quiet Italian house; inscrutable knowledge emanated from him, power as of the mountains was in his black stalwartness, and antiquity as old as the stars.

To have this apparition habitually at one's bedside, to feel the white eyes staring at one in the night, must require courage! Perhaps it was as a test of himself; more probably it was

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## GROTESQUES

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as a stimulant that d'Annunzio placed the archaic figure there. What a call to the imagination! As one of us said, "that certainly is *per non dormire!*" and the remark was true, possibly, in more senses than one.

The bathroom, next the bedroom, was much larger. It was square, white-tiled, and, unlike the rest of the house, flooded with sunshine. About a hundred reproductions of drawings by old masters patterned the walls. Here were one's favourite Leonardos, Andrea del Sartos, Michelangelos. An inscription in blue tiles read, "*Aqua est optima,*" which even an elementary knowledge of Latin was able to construe as meaning that water was the best of all gifts.

Quite by accident we discovered the most charming room of all. A little staircase started unobtrusively from one of the lower rooms. Climbing it, we found ourselves in a long, light gallery, high-ceilinged and lined with books, one wall all lead-paned window. This was evidently the poet's study, designed for calm and solitude. Its one entrance was the flight



of stairs we had mounted. One of the casements was open, giving us an exquisite view of cypress-dotted violet distances, and the silver streak of the Arno winding through the broad valley below. Nothing but an exaggerated love of contrasts could, one felt, have induced a man to shut out this bright landscape behind a screen of ivory glass, nothing but a desire for the impossible, a perverse delight in leaving a golden-aired garden for a room stained at midday as if with moonlight.

Two Lenbach drawings of Eleonora Duse hung here, and a reproduction of the della Robbia boys who sing through the ages in a pageant so full of the joy of youth and of the morning of things. I remember, too, a circular bas-relief in marble of some curly-haired, full-lipped Apollo. Among the books on the shelves we caught glimpses of old folios, of rare editions, of volumes with unfamiliar script on their title lines. A refectory table, worn to the colour of old leather, stood in the center of the room and served as a writing table, the perfect desk for a poet. On a *cassone* in a

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## G R O T E S Q U E S

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corner, among other ornaments, there was a cast of a hand, a thin, sensitive hand, the most beautiful hand one had ever seen. Assuredly it was not extravagant to imagine that this might be one of the *belle mani* referred to in the dedication of "La Gioconda."

As we drove back toward Florence through the sunset country, serene and glowing as a Bellini, I thought that no poet, perhaps, had ever had more perfect surroundings than these of d'Annunzio. Beauty, beauty, and more beauty—one could feel that this was his demand, a demand which he should unquestionably have succeeded in satisfying here. And yet, about all this treasury of loveliness, there hung an atmosphere of disquietude—a macabre and melancholy twilight. A taste for the abnormal and the extraordinary peeped out with hydra head, so that the whole had something of perfection touched by decay, like a cankered rose. It was the same quality one finds in d'Annunzio's work, the sigh of the materialist when he has smelt the flower too long, a fatigue of the senses combined with spiritual unbelief,

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## D'ANNUNZIO'S HOUSE

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and the resultant search for more violent stimuli, for more startling effects, for "madder music and for stronger wine." When the system refuses to assimilate further pleasure, comes that subtle dissatisfaction which is the Nemesis of the æsthete (and d'Annunzio is the arch-æsthete). A reflection of this disillusion was in this house of his, combined with a determined pagan purpose still to trust the senses, and nothing but the senses, to the end.

Doubtless it was his own creed, believed in with all the fervour of his eager nerves, that d'Annunzio set as a motto at the head of his play, "La Gioconda"—that quotation from Leonardo da Vinci (he, too, on one of his sides an arch-æsthete, and expressing the inexorable truths he perceived with a Greek positivism), "*Cosa bella mortal passa, e non d'arte*"—"The beautiful human thing dies, but not art."

This perhaps is the final faith of the being who is an artist before anything else, as it is the motive spring of his effort; for it is in his haunting sense of the fragility of all human and natural beauty, and in his passionate desire

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to fix this beauty in permanent form, that the artist differs from the ordinary man. Arthur Symons has spoken for the whole fraternity of poets, painters, and musicians since the world began, when he has said: "Realizing all humanity to be but a masque of shadows, and this solid world an impromptu stage as temporary as they, it is with a pathetic desire of some last illusion, which shall deceive even ourselves, that we are consumed with this hunger to create, to make something for ourselves, if at least the same shadowy reality as that about us." To Leonardo his pictures were, obviously enough, the last illusion; to d'Annunzio, his plays, and here we may perhaps find the truest measure of their worth, are surely the last sensation.

We dipped down the green hills; the brown and red domes of the most amiable of old cities were becoming stark in the pale light. The Renaissance still lives in Florence, flowery, composed, and graceful, in the beauty respected by invaders, and triumphs even over tramcars. As we swung silently through the landscape,

everywhere bells in the ancient towers were calling out the time, that time which was to hush forever the life in the strong peasant faces we passed—time which had lain to rest the untamable Buonarrotti, and dimmed the bright intentness of Pico della Mirandola, the learned metaphysical boy of Botticelli's portrait, whose name and face are equally enchanting, and wrapped in darkness the lonely, inquisitive spirit of Leonardo.

*"Cosa bella mortal passa, e non d'arte."*

The chiselled stones seemed to be singing aloud that they would hold their own against the centuries, proving with implacable certainty the truth so cruel to flesh.



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## THE GREAT AMERICAN ART

IF one were indulging in an orgy of æsthetic pigeonholing, one might, casting an appraising eye on the world, conceivably label architecture as the particular triumph of the French, words as the medium of the English, painting as the language of Italy, music as the instinctive expression of Germany. Tying tags in this broad but effective fashion, it is interesting to ask what, if any, is the great American art?

Toward the solution of this question a visiting English actor-manager once threw a helpful hint; but a recent evening at Mr. Ziegfeld's Follies provided the final answer. The acute foreigner remarked: "As far as I can see, the only real American art is jazz." This observation slowly bore fruit through several seasons of musical comedies, cabaret shows, and vaudeville performances; and the great revelation occurred that hot night at the New Amsterdam Theatre. For the Follies seemed finally to pro-

claim that vitality, originality, and capacity for perfection, hall-marks of the artist, find full elbow room and immediate appreciation only in the happy-go-lucky eccentricity of our vaudeville world. Every good musical comedy is now sheer vaudeville; all pretence of a plot has disappeared, thus leaving the musical show a far more homogeneous art. Part of one's attention is not diverted to the following of a creakingly impossible scenario. Instead one can wholly enjoy an honest variety show. Variety is the contemporary and national cry. We do not exactly say, "In nothing too much"; rather do we say, "In everything, as much as possible, but not for too long." One of the results is the kaleidoscopic drama of what England would call our "halls," a drama whose voice, whose message, whose reason for being, is syncopation.

"Say it with music." So far America, *hoi polloi* if you will (but *hoi polloi* is the nation), has not said anything except with music. National restlessness lives in the conflicting rhythm of jazz. In its precise insouciance leap out

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America's own efficiency and lack of reflection, its good nature, its self-conscious smartness, its childish and oddly pathetic craving for gaiety.

Jazz is the noise that fills a too empty room; it is the drunkenness of prohibitionists, the longing for movement and colour of those who sit on packing cases and look in vain for beauty and rhythm up and down Main Street. It is barbarically fierce in its effort to conquer vacuum, and the horn of the talking machine is its loud-mouthed interpreter, generously underscoring the violent cheerfulness of its staccato. Barbaric it is, and yet subtle, a medley of strange minor gradations running through the major implication of its tone, like the disquiets, the doubts, the melancholy, distressing the American's determined attitude of optimism.

Jazz is our folk song. It would seem that we have not developed sufficiently to have evolved anything authentic beyond folk song, any distinctive art of our own in the plastic or literary fields. Stray geniuses, Whitman and Emerson, have only served to show up the careful orthodoxy of their fellows. Literature, par-



ticularly poetry, shows signs of pulling out of the rut of foreign imitation. Robinson and Frost, Masters and Sandburg, are building up an art which mirrors America and expresses the national temperament. They are thus founding an American poetry. But their voices, heard by the few, are but thrush chirps in a wilderness; and the great American art, the art of the people, for the people, by the people, remains jazz.

Perfection is the aim and the sign of great art. Mr. Ziegfeld's Follies or the Winter Garden or an afternoon of vaudeville at the Palace are perfect of their kind. It is, therefore, with sincere enthusiasm and without a trace of irony that one recommends these phases of the American drama as the highest example of a national art. Vaudeville is happy; therefore it is both good and beautiful. Laughter preaches fellowship better than sermons; enjoyment throws magic loveliness, a golden glow, over a bare stage where a comedian, in a check suit, gregariously leans against a back-drop lamp-post. What is more, ragtime-haunted

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vaudeville, unlike the paintings of Mr. J. Alden Weir, the novels of Mr. Winston Churchill, or the criticisms of Professor Brander Matthews, delights us with the unexpected. Irony cannot exist in the face of such vanquishing vitality, such ingenuity of setting and entertainment, such speed, effectiveness, grace, and lightness of touch. No song or dance or comic skit is too long; brevity, queen of qualities, smiles triumphantly out at us between the quick rises and falls of innumerable fantastically coloured curtains. Vaudeville leads us, breathless but interested, from acrobats to sentimental songs, from pony ballets to well-played one-act tragedy. Every musician in the orchestra is mentally on his toes; every pulley is supergreased. To concentrate on the stage management of the Follies is like watching a thoroughbred take a series of fences. The revolving stage has a soul; it bounds forward to its task with a swagger; it prides itself on never making a mistake. It is American. One's brain reels at the thought of how many rehearsals have brought this Protean miracle into existence. Elaborate

sets succeed one another; great masses of people parade across the stage and are gone; the orchestra melts from one tune to another, all with the bewildering ease of mastery. The pulchritude of the performers, the quality of the dancing, of the humour, of the costumes and scenic effects, cause our vaudeville to tower above the vaudeville of any other country, as the Woolworth Building would tower above the Invalides. English "two a day" is heavy in comparison, Parisian "café concerts" meagre and tawdry. In the Follies there have been ballets full of imagination in conception and mounted with splendour and taste; the dancing of them by artists of only medium quality was the only factor which prevented them from scoring a triumph. Done by the Russians, they would have been irresistible. But, at least, they showed that American vaudeville is willing, although a bit amateurishly, to concern itself with pure beauty.

Closer attuned to the general audience is the humour of such shows. Humour is as much a necessity to us as sweets; and perhaps for the

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same climatic reason. Nerves strung to top pitch demand both food and relaxation. Nowhere is the strength of our demand for humour to be better gauged than by the response to it found in cabaret and vaudeville dancing. Shimmying, shuffling, eccentric and awkward movements are only answers to the national love of the grotesque. About the grotesque, which is a tragic thing, a negation of beauty, an expression of inhibited or disappointed search for the ideal, one could, had one the space, philosophize at length. The theory that our really characteristic art is a reaction from sensuous starvation and like all reactions, a violent thing, is certainly borne out by such manifestations as Mark Twain's bitter chuckle or the calculated extravagance of our dancing; our dancers are experts in rhythmic dislocation, in accurately timed physical buffoonery. All art is exaggeration. But in the American exaggeration there is always a self-criticism, an undertone of humour, which is an attempt at fire extinguishing that does not reduce, but curiously discolours, the flame.

Grotesque or not, vaudeville represents a throwing away of self-consciousness, of Plymouth Rock caution, devoutly to be wished for. Here we countenance the extreme; we encourage idiosyncrasy. The dancer or comedian is, sometimes literally, egged on to develop originality; he is adored, never crucified for difference. Miss Fanny Brice and the late Bert Savoy are examples of vaudeville performers who were hailed, joyfully and rightly, as vessels containing the sacred fire, and who were encouraged into self-emphasis by their audiences; they became, as a result of this appreciative stimulus, rare and interesting artists in their field.

Vaudeville, as our most vital art centre, is a treasure house of individuality. Will Rogers, a superman of coördination, swinging his lasso in complicated whirls and emitting dry patter at the expense of cabbages and kings, is quite justly the idol of his public. A vaudeville comedian in America is as close to the audience as Harlequin and Punchinello were to the Italian publics of the eighteenth century.

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He is, like them, an apparent, if not always an actual, improviser. He jokes with the orchestra leader; he tells his hearers fabricated, confidential tales about the management, the other actors, the whole entrancing world behind the scenes; he addresses planted confederates in the third row, or the gallery, and proceeds to make fools of them to the joy of all present. He beseeches his genial, gum-chewing listeners to join in the chorus of his song; they obey with a zestful roar. The audience becomes a part of the show and enjoys it. And there is community art for you. Until the cows come home Mr. Percy Mackaye can write pageants celebrating civic virtues, and so amply supplied with parts that they can be acted only by an entire township; he will never achieve the unforced and happy communion which reigns within the fifty-cent walls of the local Keith and Proctor's.

The capacity for peaceful penetration of any art is surely a sign of its vitality. We read contemporary English novelists and poets. If we can, we wear French dresses; some of us

buy French pictures. Walt Whitman was discovered in England and there is a beautiful French translation of his complete works. Emerson is not unknown in Europe; Baudelaire, long years ago, translated the gifted and sombre Poe into icily chiselled and admirably appropriate French. Oceans are crucibles, smelting machines for art. Only the best survives their perilous passage. And now, for the last decade, Europe has adopted our dance tunes. The Parisian intelligence, cold and sharp as a steel needle, yet always prepared sensitively to oscillate in the direction of the æsthetically significant, has for some time pointed due west at this true American music. Young poets celebrate it in their verse; young composers—Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric, and the others—write ballets and symphonies in which may be heard the irresponsible “can-can” of jazz. John Alden Carpenter, perhaps the most vivid talent among our own composers, will occasionally shift from coolly subtle disharmonies, illustrating poetic or lyric subjects, to write a “Krazy Kat Ballet” clever



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—and shall one say, whole-legged?—glorification of jazz.

Come on and hear, come on and hear,  
Alexander's Ragtime Band.

One likes to think of the straight, hard, young rows of our soldiers marching through grey French towns to the devil-may-care lilt of their native noise. To weary hearts, made old by anxiety, such a sound may have seemed vaguely shocking, the laughter of a child in a house of mourning. But at least it brought a message of confidence; it embodied a resilient vitality ready to fly right at difficulty, a defiant sense of the ridiculous, inclined to turn death itself into a dance.

The *joie de vivre* of jazz is perhaps, as has been hinted, a trifle hectic; it represents a young and superficial straining away from barrenness; but at any rate it is sincere, it is spontaneous, it is communistic. We can allow the Metropolitan Opera Company laboriously to put on Red Indian operas by undeniably American com-



posers; Mr. John Sargent can paint pseudo-classic and wholly insignificant figures on the walls of the Boston Museum; Mr. Daniel Chester French can make as many bronzes of Lincoln as he likes. But the only American art, the escape of everyman, discouraged by bleakness, worn by rush and machinery, into the blue of enchantment and rhythm and laughter, the art with Dionysian frenzy in it, the valid, the great American art, so far, is to be found on a blazing stage, full of shapes acrobatically dancing to the exact beat of drums and the seductively insincere moan of saxophones.



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“I, MARY MACLANE”

“I AM Mary MacLane: of no importance to the wide bright world and dearly and damnably important to Me.

Face to face I look at Me with hatred, with despair, and with great intentness.

I put Me in a crucible of my own making and set it in the flaming trivial Inferno of my mind. And I assay thus:

I am rare—I am in some ways exquisite.

I am pagan within and without.

I am vain and shallow and false.

I am of woman-sex and most things that go with that.

I am dynamic but devastated—laid waste in spirit.

I'm like a leopard and I'm like a poet and I'm like a religieuse and I'm like an outlaw.

I have brain, cerebration—not powerful, but fine and of a remarkable quality.

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“ I, MARY MACLANE ”

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I am slender in body and some way fragile  
and firm-fleshed and sweet.

I am oddly a fool and a strange complex liar  
and a spiritual vagabond.

I am eternally self-conscious, but sincere in  
it.

I am young, but not very young.

I am wistful; I am infamous.

In brief, I am a human being.

And were I not so tensely, tiredly sane, I  
would say that I am mad.”

This is how Mary MacLane of Butte, Montana (author, at the age of eighteen, of a volume called *The Story of Mary MacLane*), sums herself up in the opening chapter of her latest autobiography. No, I will not say sums herself up, for the above rather confused list of qualities pales into nothingness when compared with the subsequent expansions which fill her curious book. The too facile pen of this lonely lady plumbs with passionate, although remarkably uncontrolled and vague, intensity, the remotest depths of her own personality. *I, Mary MacLane*, contains 317 pages of self-expres-

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sion, as I suppose it will be called. And whether Mary MacLane is telling us how her inner soul gloats over a "Cold Boiled Potato at Midnight" or how "Of inanimate things" she "most hates a loose shutter rattling at night in the wind"—the subject matter is always Mary MacLane, her intimate hates, loves, lonelinesses, doubts, aspirations, and despairs.

There is a popular superstition that any human being who sincerely writes himself or herself down for the public will create an interesting record for others to read. Cellini did it, and Marie Bashkirtseff, and the gentle and melancholy Amiel; but Cellini was a vainglorious artist writing out the events of his life with Latin brio and humour, and Amiel was a reserved philosopher of delicate and unerring taste, while Marie Bashkirtseff, oversensitive and introspective as she was, yet had an objective eye when looking at herself, a certain reasonable quality, and mixed her conceited self-analysis with a good deal of healthy outer ambition and interest in the people and happenings of her time.

Not so with Miss Mary MacLane. She lives in a morass of demoralized and despondent self-interest. All worlds revolve in Blinding Flames of Power—as she easily might, but does not, say—about her Tempestuous, Unsatisfied Ego. She is badly in need of change and diversion, as the doctors put it. Her book has such a shut-in atmosphere that one cries out, “More air,” as one penetrates the labyrinth of its complexities. “Expressing breeds the last Expressions,” says Mary MacLane, thus diagnosing her own disease. Her last Expressions are so complicated, so illusive, and so darkly worded that I defy most of the reading public to “get” them.

“I live long hours of nervous, profound, passionate self-communion. I discover the subtle panting Ego—the wonderful thing that lives and waits in its garbled radiance just beneath my skin.”

What, oh, what, in the name of the Jabberwock, is a “garbled radiance”?

Heartbreaking is Miss MacLane’s choice of adjectives, terrifying the continuous stream of

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them. At times she approaches Miss Gertrude Stein in a sort of frenzied lack of meaning, and a twisting and crippling of the English tongue, which will cause her to be looked at askance by Swift and Bacon, Addison, Pater, and Stevenson, when she reaches another and a better world. Oscar Wilde, if he sees her there, will instantly invent some special form of torture for her, and the limpid Poe will wrap a black cloak more closely about him as he passes her by. Bad taste is in fact the dark shadow spreading over what is, after all, only an extra-ordinary book—the singular record of a not very singular ingrowing temperament. Melancholy, introspection, and sensitiveness are not ugly qualities, as the eternally graceful Hamlet bears witness, and yet *I, Mary MacLane*, is quite definitely ugly.

Undoubtedly this is because there is no sense of art in it, no intellectual control, no choice, no discarding. It is full of repetition of mood, overcrowding of inadequate adjectives and general lack of construction—in short, there is no honest artist's toil in it.

There is some danger that *I, Mary MacLane*, may be embraced by a certain section of the public, which is always full of that hyper-sentimental curiosity that in this country washes up like a great sloppy sea at the feet of "Personality"—capital P. It is characteristic of a young race to want to solve every problem, penetrate every nook and cranny of existence, and know every secret of a man's soul, just as these things are characteristic of a very young person. The conserving power of reserve and the steady footsteps of silence it does not understand.

Neither, one may say, does Miss MacLane. Whether she confesses, "I am fond of green peas, baseball, and diamond rings," which *has* humour, or, "I wear No. 6 gloves, the calf of my leg is a shapely thing," or "I do not want of God a passport, a safe conduct into Heaven," one sees that Miss MacLane makes the mistake of considering *all* self-revelation interesting.

Her book is a weird medley of intelligence and acutely irritating stupidity, because she totally lacks the artist's rigorous sense of propor-

tion, although she is an artist in the sense that her mind sees relations between things and resemblances. Her talent has remarkable blind spots. Her style, for instance, is what no writer's can afford to be—inconsiderate.

I have a good mental picture of Miss MacLane sliding rapidly downhill on a toboggan of frantic individualism. Her temperament has really fatally run away with her—she has not the canny and cold self-control of the artist, and her creation is no creation at all, but a rather indigestible mixed drink. "I am not Respectable, nor Refined, nor in Good Taste," says Mary MacLane, applying the sentence with perhaps a certain rebel satisfaction to her outer conduct; but unfortunately the judgment also applies to her as a writer, and makes her a bad one. It would be better for her to realize that good taste is the respectability of the brain, as it is also the real refinement and aristocracy of the soul.

Having expostulated with the weaknesses and exaggerations of *I, Mary MacLane*, and predicted a speedy tomb for it after its first



*succès de curiosité*, I now want to weave a garland of regret over the monument. There are passages of rare intelligence and discernment, passages which are unfortunately swamped by the mass of trivialities, false oddities, and mistaken sincerities, which Miss MacLane has written down. Her chapter called “The Sleep of the Dead” has the quality of a fine prose poem; there is in it originality of thought and rhythm—a beautiful instinctive fitting of words to thoughts.

“When I’m dead I want to rest awhile in my grave; for I’m Tired, Tired always.

“My Soul must go on as it has gone on up to now. It has a long way to go, and it has come a long way. . . .

“But the sleep of the dead!

“I imagine Me wrapped in a shroud of soft thin wool cloth of a pale colour, laid in a plain wood coffin: and my eyelids are closed, and my tired feet are dead, and my hands are folded on my breast. And the coffin is nine feet down in the

ground and the earth covers it. Upon that same, green sod: and above, the ancient blue deep sheltering sky: and the clouds and the winds and the suns and moons, and the days and nights and circling horizons—those above my grave.

“And my Body laid at its length, eyes closed, hands folded, down there Resting: my Soul not yet gone but laid beside my Body in the coffin, Resting.

“—might we lie like that—Resting, Resting, for weeks, months, ages—

“Year after long year, Resting.”

Again, in the little chapter called “The Strange Braveness,” there is objective, clearly-thought-out poetry, with something in it of Walt Whitman’s universal sympathy. At moments, too, Mary MacLane has flashes of delightful humour and a certain super-acute insight. Here is a strange little revelation of the human dread of discomfort:

“It is not Death I fear, nor Life.  
I horridly fear something this side

of Death but outpacing Life a little:  
a nervousness in my Stomach—a  
very Muddy Street, a Lonely Hotel  
Room.”

“I am tranquil, for to-day I had a  
walk that made me feel Sincere and  
Safe. It is a comforting feeling: it  
is like a beef-sandwich.”

“I suppose I’m very lonely. It is  
luck—luck from the stars—not to be  
beset by clusters of people, people  
who do their thinking outside their  
heads, ‘cheerful’ people, people who  
say ‘pardon me’: all the damning  
sorts scattered about obstructing  
one’s views of the horizons.”

When she does look at herself objectively  
as a character and stops telling us with her  
frankness, which savours uncomfortably of bra-  
vado, what kind of cold cream she uses, and  
just how devilish she thinks the smell of tur-  
pentine is, Miss MacLane is sometimes remark-  
ably interesting. She says of herself: “She

had not the usual defensive armour of the normal woman, for she was not a normal woman, but certain trends of varying individuals gathered into one sensitive woman-envelope."

Again:

"I am a hundred times more introspective than most people, most women. Most women, even conventional ones, are lawless—the more conventional, the more lawless usually. And so most women beat me to life. Where they yield to an impulse the moment they feel it, I, because an impulse itself is adventure-fabric—I feel of its quality, test it for defects, wash a little corner of it to see if the color will run—and conclude not to use it."

And here, to end with, is Mary MacLane's voice as she raises it to interpret human struggle and weariness, singing almost at her best in the chapter called "The Strange Braveness":

“If God has human feelings he must often have a burning at the eyes and a fulness at the throat at the strange Braveness of human people: their Braveness as they go in their daily life, with aching dumbish minds, and disgruntled bereft bodies, and flattened, pinched, gnawed hearts.

“The easy human slattern way would be to sink beneath the burden.

“Instead, people: I and Another and all others—seamstresses and monotonous clerks and lawyers and housewives: sit upright in chairs and talk into telephones and walk fast and eat breakfasts and brush hair: all the while marooned in a morass of small, wild, unexciting, tasteless Pain.

“Of others—what do I know?

“But I might say, ‘Look, God, I am not fallen on the ground, from

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## GROTESQUES

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this and that—utterly lost and down. But sitting up: drooping but strong, in a chair, mending a lampshade—neat, orderly and at-it in my misery.’”



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## SUBJECTIVE PAINTING

THE pained astonishment created by the first appearance of "Futurism" is, happily, a thing of the past. In polite circles the subject is now ignored, much as if it had been a saddening aberration of the human mind. The multitude, having had its laugh out, has passed on—to fresher objects of derision.

To an outsider, the aim of the Futurist seemed to be to express, on canvas or in clay, the abstract and composite reactions personal to the artist, by means of lines, or patterns, or masses, or colours, springing arbitrarily from his consciousness and having no necessary connection with any lines, or patterns, or colours existing in the visible world before him.

When in front of a violin, for instance, the Futurist will not draw the violin as his eye sees it, but the total impression produced by it upon his sensibilities, not only by its shape and texture, but by its emotion-evoking associa-

tions. He must necessarily express himself in symbols, and his method will not differ from that of the man who first chiselled signs upon a rock and, in his own mind, identified those signs with some sight, or sound, or sensation actually experienced by him. The method of the Futurist, then, is the method of the creator of an alphabet. He is a dealer, not in representations, but in associations.

He will not, he asserts, be limited by the mere rendering on his canvas of the objective. His art—an expression in symbols of his most subjective sensations—seems to him more inspired by the rhythm of the universe, more poetic, more sincere, than could be any accurate representation of mere objective form. The hieroglyphics that he traces are abstracts of past experiences and emotional adventures. They are marks made on his soul by the seething spirit of his time.

It is, for instance, a very noticeable tendency in Futurist art to cover the canvas with a confused mass of lines, occupying every inch of available space and giving an impression of



crowding and lack of repose in the design. This is not an accidental phenomenon, but a very definite result of the impression made on the minds of such artists by the speed, tension, and chaotic complexity of modern life.

Obviously a man's temperament is inseparable from his handiwork. Thus, we obtain in Titian's creations, his love of the splendours and greatnesses of life; in Giorgione's, his strong sense of the passing moment; in Michelangelo's, the tortured violence of his sensibilities, or in Watteau's, his graceful and melancholy scepticism. These are the spiritual qualities dwelling subtly behind those artists' revelations of recognizable form. And it is in this union of the objective and subjective worlds—in life seen through the coloured window of a temperament—that we have been accustomed to find the complete and satisfying work of art.

Concerning the sanity of the Futurist's process, there have existed many—for the greater part hilarious—doubts. It is a process which any of us might indulge in.

Were I, for instance, to order myself to put down in symbols the impression produced upon my subconsciousness by a ride on the top of a Fifth Avenue bus on a fine winter's morning, I think I could manage to cover a canvas with signs which would, with the utmost sincerity, represent to me that particular impression. I would first draw two parallel and perpendicular lines, starting them somewhere near the bottom of the picture, and I would top them with a horizontal line about halfway up the canvas. This arrangement of lines would, for some reason which I am unable to explain, satisfactorily symbolize the bus. Then I would choose a point higher up on the canvas and from it draw two heavy descending lines set at an angle wide enough to include the hieroglyph already referred to. These new lines would, for some equally obscure reason, accurately represent to me the velocity of the rapidly moving motor. Then I would probably introduce in various corners of the picture, three or four red streaks indicating morning sunlight, a portion of a fur neckpiece, the crown of a man's derby hat, a

small round disc near a stiff black line (symbolizing the obligatory dime and its relation to the conductor's metal box), and, with a few more touches of like nature, my work would be complete. I would call it "The Top of the Bus" and it would doubtless be the source of infinite merriment among unbelievers at the Futurist exhibition, where there seems to be no cause to imagine that it would not be hung.

To suspect the sincerity or good faith of a Futurist is a good deal like questioning the integrity of a man who chooses to pass his entire life alone on a mountain top. It is the peculiar irony of his position that, striving as he does for a self-revelation more complete than the ordinary, seeking somehow to synthetize, and give form to his most complicated reactions and sensations, he should yet discover his final creation to be, as a rule, an insoluble puzzle to the greater part of humanity.

Futurists like to point to El Greco as a fine example of deliberate distortion of form and to ask you triumphantly if you can deny the Spaniard's greatness. In the face of El Greco's

imaginative power, his rhythmic sense and decorative instinct; in the face of the charm and sincerity of the Italian Primitives—often so ignorant of the rules of perspective—or in the face of Cézanne's significant simplification of form, it is obviously ridiculous to insist on accurate representation as the *sine qua non* of great art.

Art should be "stronger than rules." It is only when a man's objection to rules or conventions is ascribable to laziness or to the lack in him of a sense of harmonious structure that his works fail to justify themselves. A Whitman or a Cézanne is strong enough to create, not only new thoughts, but new forms.

The case of the Futurist, is, however, different. For he has chosen to express himself in a language which is not only exempt from past rules, but is deliberately coined and constructed by himself alone. His mental associations between sensation and form are merely hieroglyphs, signs to the meaning of which we can have no clue, inasmuch as the meaning of them varies in every artist.

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## SUBJECTIVE PAINTING

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Art as subjective as this can hardly have a universal appeal. I remember that I once walked through an exhibition of canvases by Matisse, Picasso, and other painters, catalogue in hand, conscientiously examining the pictures one by one. Presently I came across a pen-and-ink drawing, which, by consulting my catalogue, I discovered to be entitled "Nasturtiums." It was a series of intricate lines woven into a diagram that the most skilled of geometers need not have blushed for. Well, curiously enough, the network of the design somehow found an obscure echo in my subconsciousness and I was forced to admit to myself that the artist's psychic impression of nasturtiums did, by some rare chance, coincide with my own abstract and until then unformulated idea of these flowers.

The outside response, however, depending as it does on identity of mental concepts, is, for the Futurist, bound to be of the slenderest. He can only hope to hit the target once in a great many attempts. Perhaps those who are "in the movement" fully understand one an-

other. But somehow one doubts it. A similarity of brain tissue would be necessary, one imagines, before two minds could, with complete and immediate comprehension, grasp all of one another's abstract conceptions when expressed in such purely arbitrary terms.

Could I, for instance, commission a painting entitled "The Violin" from sixty futurist artists and be at all certain that any two of them would in any way resemble each other? Could Max Weber, for example, understand the personal hieroglyphics of Boccione's "Violin"? Could Matisse follow Picasso's? Could any one of them guess that the emotion-stirring germ at the bottom of each canvas was the same—namely, a violin?

It is only fair to the Futurist, however, to explain that he lays a marked emphasis on design, on the creation of harmonious forms and colour, as vital parts of the pattern which he imposes upon his canvas.

The Futurist often asserts the unimportance of subject and prefers to give his work no definite title. He dislikes the word "picture" as

applied to his creations, for he is not in any sense picturing anything in the world. He is merely writing down an abstract of his emotions. He is in revolt against "story telling," or literary pictures. He claims that his work is in a region of pure æsthetics where the artist's only preoccupation is with form, line and colour, in and for themselves, and untouched by any limiting purpose of representation or verisimilitude.

This implies that, since there are no tactile values in his work, he can be judged only according to his power as a decorative artist. But if his aim is more complex, if he gives his work a title, and if his purpose is not only to appeal to our feeling for form and colour and pattern, but to convey to us his moods and sensations as well, then the Futurist is a failure, because his symbols, however decoratively grouped, can give us no certain clue as to their meaning, inasmuch as they are the result of an unreasoning and purely instinctive method of mental association, personal to him.

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## AUGUSTUS JOHN

THE outstanding figure among living English painters is undoubtedly Augustus John. Since Whistler there has been in England no such artistic storm centre. Born a Romany, John is a rebel by racial inheritance. His work has always been a vigorous assertion of the artist's complete freedom of will. His election to the Royal Academy, however, marks the most surprising step of his adventurous life and removes him in the eyes of the conservatives, from the outer darkness of unhallowed modernism.

Everything about Augustus John is picturesque—his name, his appearance, his point of view, and his artistic career. In England he seems a little what every real artist must always appear on that safe and sane island: a dynamite bomb or a tornado. Like Shelley or Bernard Shaw, he is rather discomfiting to his compatriots; his wheels revolve fast and furi-



ously; they break all intellectual traffic regulations.

He is the most vigorous personality in modern English art if one excepts Jacob Epstein, who is not a native Englishman. He owes some of the wayward intensity that we see in his art to the gypsy origin of which he is justly proud. There is something passionate in all his work, a smouldering vivacity which hints at the sudden explosive rhythm of a song or dance. One feels in him the ambidexterous capacity for emotional expression which is the privilege of a Romany's supple temperament. Certainly he can play in different keys; his range extends from plastically, almost brutally constructed portraiture in paint through imaginative and shrill symphonies in colour and daringly accentuated lithographs to delicate pencil drawings which are as exquisitely final as the sketches of the Renaissance masters.

For years John was frowned upon or derided by the conservative. Although he has never been attracted by the rationalism of the Cubists, being of a far too elemental nature,

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he has satisfactorily offended the timid by the care-free baldness and boldness of his statement. And this in spite of the fact that he has thrown a sop to Cerberus by frequently showing traces in his work of his admiration for traditional masters, the Italian primitives, particularly Botticelli.

Lately, triumphing over the suspicion of the ritualists, his strength and quality have come into their own; after years of receiving appreciation only from discerning fellow artists and a group of fashionable connoisseurs, he has finally twisted the British lion's tail, and sits enthroned on its back, a curiously unacademic member of the Royal Academy.

John's colour is hard, acid, galvanizing in its crudity. We are electrically shocked by the oranges, the apple greens, the cobalt blues flung, with apparent carelessness, on his inky-haired models. Unsmiling and perhaps, sometimes—when the thrill does not come off—unpleasant in his cold turmoil of bright hues, he does not finally triumph or capture us through his palette, but through his emotional draughts-

manship and the powerful imaginative "overtone" of his pictures. In him there is a tragic blending of the ironist and the dreamer which extraordinarily relates him to that fanciful and unwilling realist, J. M. Synge. Like Synge, John poetizes the actual and disturbs legend with fact.

"There are nights," says the mythical prince Naisi in Synge's epic tragedy, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, "when queens will stick their tongues out at the rising moon." If John should paint a queen, he might very conceivably show her meditating that unbecoming act. He, too, is a master of the grotesque, an inverted idealist. His gypsy pictures have the atmosphere of Synge's peasant comedies; like them they are savage, discordant, bizarre and yet at bottom possess undeviating truthfulness.

There is something inherently free in all John's work and a strangeness in his atmosphere which does not arise from his choice of unusual types for subjects—his interest in gypsies and tramps—but rather from the fully revealed force of his own imaginative individu-

ality. Mr. Charles Marriott, in an admirable essay on John, says: "Painting his own edition of the universe, Augustus John can afford to quote anybody—even Nature. In many of his pictures it would be possible to identify the model; and, incidentally, a great deal of his popularity with clever people is due to the fact that his favourite model is of an unusual type. They regard it as proof of unconventionality. This, if he thinks about it at all, which I doubt, must amuse him enormously. His art is unconventional, but in a very special meaning of the word. I have never seen a picture of his that looked like a protest either against anything in art or anything in life. That is why his art is so magnificently subversive. It is as subversive as a daisy which goes its own way whatever happens. If I were an autocratic ruler I would pass his pictures of mumpers and the like because, though quite incidentally, they flatter the idea of society; but I would not allow pictures like 'In a Kitchen Garden' and 'The Blue Pool.' I should be afraid that they would encourage people to live in their own editions of

the universe—which is the last word in freedom. Once let a man revel in his world of conceptions, and you cannot touch him.” Mr. Marriott adds: “Augustus John’s possession of his own mental kingdom makes his world extraordinarily consistent. Obviously his figures and landscapes belong to the same world.”

The cohesion of John is, as Mr. Marriott indicates, his most startling and impressive attribute. It is the quality that makes us feel him to be a giant. He is broad-shouldered and entire, a smaller Walt Whitman; and, as Whitman, he does not carp at anything in the universe, but rather accepts all and healthily uses it for his own ends.

He is too much alive not to reflect the spirit that informs his time. “Often,” says Mr. Marriott, “it would be difficult to assign a definite meaning to his pictures, but they always seem to have a meaning, probably beyond his own exposition in words; and the curious thing is that the meaning generally seems to be on the side of what sensitive and more articulate minds are trying to formulate as contemporary

gospel." What one discerns in his work is the modern soul's adventurous search for truth, its refusal to visualize existence as pretty or simple or regulated, its acceptance of conflict, excess, disproportion and pain as necessary elements in the universe. His paintings are as dynamic and unexpected as the world around us. They are a cosmos because they do not rule out either beauty or ugliness, but combine both in a sort of breathless ardour.

John does not believe in rules, nor does he make them; he follows a gleam where it leads him. There is no criticism in him; indeed, a glance at his portraits will convince one of his detachment—his healthy aloofness above moralizing as of some creature not quite and a little more than human—an intensely observant centaur, perhaps!

His spiritual outlook, like every painter's, is reflected in all his work; but in his drawings one catches what seems the clearest echo of his mind. They are swift expressions of his reaction to form. They show a vibrant appreciation of the human body, but a characteristic

welcoming of its faults as well as its perfections, both rendered with a nervous, sure line, which has something of the acuteness of Rembrandt's pen stroke. John's sharper drawings have something of the veracity of Rembrandt's ink sketches—those terrible lightning flashes of insight, exposing the human body with all its beauties or flaws—ruthlessly and yet with a passionate humanitarianism. John shares Rembrandt's compassionate love for the ultimate truth of the nude, whether it has been glorified or vanquished by life. Like the earlier painter, John is a curious mixture of romantic and realist; he grows lyrical over beauty, but he is also literally fascinated by ugliness. It is his capacity for both idealism and harsh pity (realism is always inverted pity), his well of poetic emotion, which makes him a rather startling figure among the important modern painters, who, most of them, like Cézanne, Matisse, or Picasso, have been absorbed primarily in the creation of pattern and other purely æsthetic problems, and do not possess John's catholic



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interest in humanity nor his romantic response to nature.

He ranks with them, on their æsthetic side, thanks to his amazing draughtsmanship, his pencil which becomes powerful when it expresses mass and delicate when it outlines grace, and thanks, too, to his vivid and sometimes crude colour schemes, which are always original. He has also fought their battle by the side of the modernists: the fight against representation considered as the aim of art. Although he has not created abstract patterns, such as Matisse's in order to drive home the lesson that the painter is no photographic apparatus, but a nervous system personally expressing, not recreating nature, he has proved his point very conclusively by his paintings and drawings, which are never dull maps of the visual world, but "arrangements" as Whistler would say, and "exaggerations" as Wilde would say, full of authentic life because they contain all the divergence and caprice and fervour of an individual.



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## PAUL MANSHIP

THE appearance of Paul Manship in American art was marked by his wide and immediate success. Having its origin among the inner circle of the *cognoscenti*, his fame spread rapidly to the general public, with the result that he is now one of the best-established figures in contemporary sculpture.

We may find the key to his rapid coming into his own in his very special qualities:—a tendency towards extreme decorative formalism; a poetic fancy, which casts whimsical light over mythology; and a cultivated and unerring taste—qualities which, because of their absence in much modern sculpture, were bound to create a profound impression on a public surfeited with hasty and unconsidered realism.

Manship's most important characteristic is undoubtedly his decorative instinct. His infinite care for design is always apparent.

Besides this sense of rhythm in line, Man-

ship brings to his work another gift natural to the decorator—a passion for beautiful detail. The ordered folds of his drapery, each one ironed into its indisputable place; the delicately traced network of hair; the figures or conventional designs which bejewel his bases; the rarity of his patines, among which we find strange dull shades as of ancient bronzes long buried, or phantomlike touches of half-faded gold—all are evidences of an interest in surface, unusual, if not unique, in this hurried century, and reminiscent of the best artisanship of the Renaissance.

A Manship can, in fact, be placed in a room, just as a Cellini or a Gian Bologna can, without creating the disastrous “bull in a china shop” effect produced by less decorative sculpture. Their refinement enables many of his smaller works to be classed, and used, as bibelots of real value.

He has the feeling for the proper “framing” of sculpture, which so many latter-day artists lack, and we find, in everything he does, evidence of an architectural sense of proportion, a

regard for the *ensemble* which makes his bases, for instance, appropriate and delightful adjuncts to his figures.

To his decorative faculty, Manship adds a very peculiar poetry. There is a fairy tale in each one of his creations, a hint at far and luring unreality. To the imaginative mind, those works of art are always most entrancing which, besides plastic or tactile value, contain some hidden spirit of romance. Strangeness has ever been a part of beauty. Suggestion, rather than exposition, is the secret of great art. Not the least of their qualities, therefore, is the quaint mystery of Manship's statues. He has, most emphatically, the imagination of an archæologist.

Not only does he choose legendary subjects; he insists, also, on giving his figures a look as of age; on endowing them with archaic features. His nymph, Calypso, singing as she twangs a lyre, seems for untold æons to have lain hidden in some Asian mound; and as for his "Bri-seis," standing before us so still and so remote,

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who shall tell whence she came or what tragic events her downcast eyes have looked upon?

So—irresistibly attracted by the spirit of former centuries—it is perhaps only natural that Manship should have become enamoured of the ancient techniques. His taste, intensely cultivated, and doubtless responsible for so much of his felicity, has travelled long and is tremendously sophisticated. He has flirted with the Indians, the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Renaissance Italians. His worship of beauty extends to all schools.

In a time and a country not distinguished by appreciation for past greatness, and in which artists have often obviously—and to their detriment—omitted to kneel at the various shrines of loveliness scattered along the ages, it is refreshing to meet such a sensitively responsive temperament as Manship's.

Beauty, wherever he can find it, is surely the pole star by which the artist steers; those who neglect to cultivate their taste, proclaiming loudly that knowledge impairs originality, are merely cutting off their own wings. To

educate and refine an artist's possibilities has always been the mission of great art. The true creator finds only inspiration in the works of masters; he does not fear their influence.

Those among modern artists who are not giants, however, must always stagger a little under the weight of their spiritual inheritance. If they happen to be especially sensitive to form, as such, there is always the danger that they will not be able to throw off the impression produced upon them by earlier masters. Many of these less strong personalities, in their fierce effort to liberate themselves, have exploded into the insincere *naïveté* of cubism, post-impressionism—*Brancusism*, if one may coin a word.

Not so, Manship. If we find in him a too intellectual search for beauty and a not sufficiently vigorous emotional reaction to life, we must give him full credit for his unfailing restraint. More self-respecting and self-controlled artistically than Eli Nadelman, for instance, a sculptor who, like him, has the complex mind of a critic and an interpreter—

and therefore an extraordinarily clever understanding of past art—he does not allow his sophistication to find a violent evasion from itself in extravagance; nor does he permit his desire for novelty (always the bane of the æsthete) to degenerate into anything like mistifying distortion.

Like Arthur B. Davies—in some of his phases—Manship has simply been unable to exclude from his work those features of previous art which he particularly cherishes; and in his less successful efforts, one is too conscious of the discrepancy between modern modelling of a naturalistic kind and the features and gestures of archaic sculpture.

His quick, assimilative faculty, the readiness of his comprehension, his impressionability to beauty, at all times are more notable than his originality, and have conspired to build up in him a curiously hybrid spirit.

Significant is his tendency towards experimenting with styles. He piques us, for instance, by surrounding his well-known “Head of a Baby”—a masterpiece as realistic in treat-

ment as Rodin's study for the head of Balzac—with a graceful, Donatello frame.

This toying with manners is symptomatic of his too intense preoccupation with style—a preoccupation often the first sign of artistic decadence. We feel that this is the game of a scholar, a little weary of his knowledge, and seeking a new sensation in the combination of widely contrasting manners—a thing very different from the almost unconscious form evolved by a simpler and more powerful temperament reacting directly to life.

But it is not necessary to quarrel with Manship for the traces of dilettanteism which we find in him, nor to decry him because he is more cultured than vital. If art is not to him an interpretation of life, but an escape from it, we should not lament; we should, rather, be grateful for those beauties in his work which are natural expressions of his particular genius—for his grace of line, his unfailing beauty of composition, the patient exquisiteness of his workmanship, and the richness and delicacy of his fancy.

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## MON AMI PIERROT

THE first fifteen years of this present century in the United States were marked by an effort to import the spirit of the preceding decade—the English 'nineties—into our artistic and literary midst. Echoes of Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, and the *Yellow Book* sounded suddenly. From one day to the next, the era became one of highly decorative posters, magazine covers and advertisements. Following the *fin-de-siècle* artists of Chelsea and Soho, the prolific Paul Poiret (most revolutionary of Parisian dressmakers), Léon Bakst, and the Russian Ballet influenced modern decoration and converted what used to be conventional pictures into wild experiments in colourful fantasy. Across the black backgrounds so markedly prevalent in this phase of art, one was continually being struck by the presence of a white Pierrot. The Pierrot owned a certain field. He was flitting across posters



and enlivening the covers of monthlies and was more before the public than, perhaps, ever before. Why was this? Not only, one felt, because in the popular mind he had come conveniently to symbolize festivity and lightness of heart and turned exponent of cabaret-show gaiety, a one-stepping, uncrowned king of the Great White Way. There was something more behind his perpetual figuring against those orange-mooned black backgrounds; some spiritual reason for his haunting of so many artists' minds.

What, then, is Pierrot's meaning? A thing very far removed, surely, from the general conception of him as a clown with a slight French accent. The clown, indeed, is his descendant, but a descendant who has lost the grace and poetry of his forefather and knows not his patrician aloofness nor the light yet persistent elusiveness of his ways. The clown, when his beating of the drum is done, will scrub his paint off, one knows, and make for the corner tavern, there to eat cabbage soup and joke with his plebeian acquaintance. Not so Pierrot.

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When his day is finished, wandering through moonlit aristocratic gardens, he drinks for nourishment the dew from bay leaves, and soothes his empty stomach with the sweepings of his everlasting guitar strings. Perhaps he draws his worn black velvet cloak a little closer about him as the chill of the evening breeze strikes through the floating white of his blouse. But he saunters on with a careless ease and a real delight at the beauty of the solitary kingdom which is his, and the moon shines kindly for him as for her favourite child.

*"Au clair de la lune, mon ami Pierrot . . ."*

A creature of song and moonlight, his appeal is to the fantastic in us, and down the ages he has sung his way through art and poetry, the representative of airy countries of the imagination, the laughing, pirouetting opponent of deadly reality. Born of Italian comedy and drifting across to the France of Watteau and Pater, he is a Latin product, how profoundly un-Anglo-Saxon the most summary inquiry into his character would reveal. For life is to him frankly but an experience, and his only moral-

ity is courage, the courage to laugh and weep and sing when the spirit moves him and to tell the truth as to what he sees; and for the rest, he is not averse to pleasure or the playing of merry tricks at the expense of bourgeois virtue or Philistine respectability. He is the scaler of walls, the adventurer by night, who travels on tiptoe with a finger at his lips. He is the strummer of dissonances under worthy windows, the cock-crower before the dawn, the stealthy smasher of the watchman's lantern. He is the sly friend of little children, beckoning merrily to them from leafy distances and bringing them bright-hued butterflies delicately pinched between his bony fingers.

So much for the lighter aspects of his tradition. But there is a darker and less universally recognized element in his legend, and one which goes far towards making his meaning more evident.

If we will, we can catch a first glimpse of it in Watteau's treatment of him. For Watteau gives him to us grave, heavy, immovable, always posed a little apart from what other fig-

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ures may be in the picture, as when in "Gilles," for instance, he stands with drooping arms, his back to his companions, relieved of the necessity for grins and grimaces, plunged in a sphinxlike and philosophical calm. An uncharacteristic pose, we would say, and leaving us oddly disturbed by its wooden solemnity.

Aubrey Beardsley takes him from the canvases of eighteenth-century France, and, far from reassuring us, makes him very consciously grotesque and unreal and corpselike in the decorative exquisiteness of his black and white. And finally Paul Verlaine, conceiving him in much the same vein as did Beardsley, gives us that clue to his significance which we have been so long looking for. Emphasizing the melancholy which lurks behind his insolent grin, pointing out with what irrevocableness the footlights separate him from the applauding crowds, indicating his freezing of mad and ridiculed passion into masklike stolidity—these things which Watteau only hinted at—Verlaine has at last revealed the Pierrot to be the

true symbol of the artist, the eternal player on the guitar, the creature who, by the fantastic grotesqueness of his costume and the unnatural bedaubing of his face, as much as by his innate proclivity for song, must be and continue to be different and detached and solitary among men.

“*Ridi, Pagliacci*”—Leoncavallo, somewhat cheaply, caught the idea. But Verlaine has said it once and for all in his astounding poem, “The Grotesques.”

*Le sage, indigné, les harangue;  
Le sot plaint ces fous hasardeux;  
Les enfants leur tirent la langue  
Et les filles se moquent d’eux.*

*C’est que, sur leurs aigres guitares  
Crispant la main des libertés,  
Ils nasillent des chants bizarres,  
Nostalgiques et révoltés;*

*C’est enfin que dans leurs prunelles  
Rit et pleure—fastidieux—  
L’amour des choses éternelles,  
Des vieux morts et des anciens dieux.<sup>1</sup>*

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## GROTESQUES

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Perhaps, then, living in an age whose preoccupation was not primarily an æsthetic one, it was with a curious subconscious sense of what he represents that those who were creators of beauty among us turned to the Pierrot and rallied around the standard of his gossamer personality. Perhaps it was that they threw his graceful irresponsibility half defiantly in the face of material progress and praised the careless charm of his ways as a challenge to utilitarianism. Who knows? And in their pity, perhaps; in their sense of his solitude, of the fatigue as of a tired child that they guessed at behind his jauntiness, of the fundamental melancholy which haunts his melodious path through the universe—a solitude, a fatigue, and a melancholy which they had felt themselves since they themselves were of his kin—they were echoing Paul Verlaine's vision of this eternal singer's isolation:

*Ce n'est plus le rêveur lunaire du vieil air—  
Sa gaieté, comme sa chandelle, hélas! est morte,  
Et son spectre aujourd'hui nous hante, mince et clair.  
Et voici que parmi l'effroi d'un long éclair*

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MON AMI PIERROT

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*D'un linceul.*

*Sa pâle blouse a l'air, au vent froid qui l'emporte,  
Avec le bruit d'un vol d'oiseaux de nuit qui passe,  
Ses manches blanches font vaguement par l'espace  
Des signes fous auxquels personne na répond.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>The wise man indignantly harangues them,  
The dullard pities such rash fools,  
Children stick their tongues out at them,  
And women turn and mock at them.

Over their bitter instruments  
Clawing with untrammelled hands,  
They whine strange,  
Nostalgic, and revolted songs.

For in their eyes  
Laughs and cries—fastidious—  
The love of eternal things,  
Of the long-dead, and the ancient gods.

<sup>2</sup>He is not the moonlit dreamer of the old song—  
His gaiety, like his candle, alas, is dead;  
His spectre haunts us to-day, tall and thin and  
white,—

And see, how in the shock of a lightning flash  
His pale garment, blown by the cold wind,  
Seems like a shroud—

With the sound of a flock of passing birds in the  
night,  
His white sleeves wave vaguely through the emptiness,  
Mad signals which no one answers.

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## THE LAND OF THE LOST EMOTIONS

IT is a country of everlasting dawn, and wide green plains, and huge trees, where a calm broods and no wind stirs through the leafy thoroughfares. Here and there, between the inky thickets, there are glimpses of lonely shapes, wandering down avenues of sand which reach in parallels towards the sea. And on the fields, jewelled over with flowers, soft footsteps fall, and arms stretch up towards the translucid sky. Pebbles drop suddenly from bordering paths into the quiet brooks. Sometimes a hawk arrows up from the forest, as if startled at some commotion on the moss below.

Across the giant plain, on the horizon line, there is always a group of figures, caught black against the surrounding whiteness. Their clearly seen movements are fervent and oddly



reiterated, but they seem as empty of purpose as the bubbles that rise at dusk to the surface of a hidden pool. Some of the silhouettes are swinging censers, high, low, and high again; the fugitive incense floats up into the air like a blue veil, carrying no keen scent as it wreathes itself ghostlike about the trunks of solitary trees on the dunes. Others are clashing soundless cymbals together in a rhythm heard only of themselves, and to which their lifted knees keep time. They gaze curiously over their shoulders, as they cause the golden discs to meet, peering into the distance as if searching for some reverberating answer to their gestures. Three blind men stand quiet and stretch ungainly arms into the vastness, nor dare step back or forward. Musicians play on voiceless lutes, with pale quick-moving fingers—such interest stamped upon their tilted heads! Others, with necks thrown back, are open-mouthed as if in song, but no sound comes from their lips, and they are breathlessly attitudinized—like the marble boy choristers of Donatello. A man with a tall ladder is running

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up the bars, only to crash to earth as his weight nears the top of it. He sets it on its feet again, and starts to mount once more.

Here come uncouth hunchbacks dressed in velvets and silks, quarrelling among themselves and tearing to pieces a silver flower which they have plucked from the heavens. Rebellious, wild-locked men are swinging great phantom hammers with which they seek to destroy. A tumbler hurls through the air, twisting and turning, grinning with hot, anguished mirth. A monk is beating himself on the breast as he treads a crucifix underfoot, and a panting hairy man is struggling, half in play, half in earnest, with a four-footed beast whose ivory-set jaws are flecked with foam. And there are many figures who weep, and many who call out, across the emptiness, and many who seem to be searching endlessly for something they have lost. So do they all dance and limp and stumble across the low horizon, and yet do not advance, but are gesticulating forever on one spot beneath a fixed, unchanging star.

For they are the lost emotions—the solitary

and wasted emotions that have never found expression or won the name of action, and so are condemned to perpetual ineffectiveness.

They are the desires that have remained unfulfilled; they are dreams by day, and insomnias by night. They are the broken resolves. They are the unrealized ambitions of quixotic youth, and the haunting regrets of age. They are the songs of childhood, forgotten; they are memories of past risings of the moon, and of the breaking of waves on foreign shores. They are the agonized nostalgias of sleepless exiles for the sound of horses' feet on asphalt pavements, and the desperate remembrances of lovers concerning delicate white hands. They are the unrequited loves—veiled weeping women who walk alone; and the unequal affections, upon whose faces are finely drawn lines. They are passionate words never spoken, and vain kisses in the empty air, and secret suicides in praise of careless charm. They are gifts which are longings; they are chance looks which are adventures. They are the shy, perplexed sufferings of little children. They are the frail,

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half-born pities that flit through overcrowded minds; they are the dumb, unasked forgivenesses of those who have been sinned against. They are the paralyzed farewells of those who realize they will never meet again in life. They are lonely terrors in the night, and strangled cries of drowning men, and the awed solitude of the journeyer in the desert. They are sudden, unbidden tears at the sight of beauty; and long, long kneelings in churches before kind, painted images. And some are wrapped about in false splendour and are the hopes of those who should be hopeless. They are the glorious hallucinations of drugged men, and the sweet, too brief slumbers of those swindled ones who long for the sleep of death.

Sometimes the spectres join hands and reel about in a whirling medley, those who weep and those who sing alike, the light-footed ones and those who drag after them a heavy weight. It is a saraband of convicts, a minuet of desperadoes. They are dancing because they are tired of their own eternal attitudes, and seek

to melt them into a common movement that will bring them each forgetfulness.

But soon they grow weary; their hands fall apart, and they break away from each other—a little flurried and maddened by this false anodyne of motion. Some fling themselves gasping on the ground. There they lie and stare up at the white heavens, and press their fingers to their hearts, for they feel their familiar pain upon them once again. Others rise and stray off in the waiting forest, to swing themselves up the trees and peer down into the glassy ponds, where they at last, though dimly, find that echo of themselves for which they so abidingly yearn. And some go and stand, with folded arms, alone on rocky promontories, and watch in silence the unvaried east where hovers a dawn that will never become day.



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## ELEONORA DUSE

“To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men—that is genius.”

—EMERSON.

ELEONORA DUSE was incomparably the most significant figure in the theatre of her time. Through years of action and inaction the peculiar quality of her genius and person, even the misfortunes of her private experience, achieved a growing fame so that in the end and long before her death there was a Duse legend. Duse and her art stood out through passing time, were speculated upon, quoted, deeply and critically admired, and—during a long absence from the public eye—regretted. Lovers of the theatre who had never seen her realized by listening to what people who had applauded her said and did not say, that here was something spiritually arresting in the realm of drama. So, when after the war Duse resumed

her stage career, playing in Italy, Vienna, London, and the United States, her return meant much both to those who knew her acting and to those who did not.

What we saw at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, on the opening night of her last American tour, was a slender, lithely moving woman, bearing the mark of time in her grey hair, showing the long wear of living in the ascetic modelling of a face which had a certain unquenched luminosity. What we also saw was dignified grace, lightness of touch in the evocation of feeling, sophistication of spirit—a curiously individual kind of acting, that was not stressed, that provided no familiar sensations, that renounced strategic attacks on the audience and the whirlwind explosions of a Bernhardt, that led us on and baffled and yet beckoned again, like a distant light.

The theory of her art was never formulated by Duse in so many words. By critics it was variously ticketed as “realism,” “naturalism,” etc. Certainly the net result of it, under repeated observation, was an effect of interior

reality, a closeness to life, a touching of essentials, which made most acting seem the easily rosy game of grown-up children. Duse's acting was not obviously realistic; it scorned photographic or external accuracy. It had discarded, for instance, the trick of make-up, all the upholstery and convention and elaborate make-believe of the theatre. It was never "life itself," as people say, when they mean the reproduction of life's trappings. Her work was a mystical and harmonious restatement. She presented her material on her own terms, as the painter or composer does, so that her various rôles did not give us "the emotion of recognition" which is provided by smart or sumptuous copies of character and circumstance. Instead, her parts were lit by the individual and lonely glow of her imagination and her idealism. She was a poet, living in her own world, concerned with ideas and with adventures of the spirit.

Such playing did not readily yield its secret. Notoriously did critics disagree in drawing conclusions about Duse. There was, on the one hand, a group which assured us that in Duse's

impersonation there was no technique, or at least none through which a pin could be stuck, nothing that could be isolated or labelled; on the other hand, there was a faction, headed long ago by Bernard Shaw, which claimed that here was a technique so bountiful in "points" blending imperceptibly into one another, so consummate, that it ended by concealing itself. Who will resolve the question? To this observer the truth of the matter seemed to be that Duse's native facility, her histrionic endowment, so outdistanced any other player of our time as to make the term "technique" a superfluous invention of critics; this immediate translation of conception into form, this close and swift and subtle externalization of ideas, this unapproached naturalness was the result of a gift for expression instinctive and unself-conscious and unending. In the attempt to penetrate Duse's secret we cannot afford to lose ourselves in analysis of her method; this method, one guesses, depended inevitably on the spirit behind it, changed with it, just as her body with such exquisite response followed out

the promptings of her mind. One feels that those who argued that in her naturalness there was no technique were right to this extent—that her method depended on her mood, that for the interpretation of a certain scene she would, one day, being in a certain emotional state, find a sudden illuminating gesture or inflection which she would perhaps never use again.

In other words, her art was a fluid thing, a perpetual discovery, a spiritual divination too intense and absorbed to be irretrievably fixed in prepared and set formulæ. There was often in it a preponderance of subconscious over conscious, a brushing aside, one imagines, of external rules and regulations and preconceived business. This does not mean that one felt in her a loss of control, an abdication of the censoring consciousness which Coquelin said no actor should ever lose; she was not swept away by emotion, there was no hysteria possible when such an intelligence as hers held the helm; only we felt that she left a path clear for abrupt

inspiration, for exaltation, for the spontaneously revealing look or gesture—for what, after all, underlies the whole history and art of acting—improvisation.

To illustrate, one need only consider the two performances of "Ghosts" which she gave in New York. The big lines of the part, as she conceived it, remained the same; the details varied. At that particular, terrible moment, for instance, when, as Mrs. Alving, she overheard her son repeating the amorous adventure of his father and thus giving the first indication of what his inheritance truly is, Duse's treatment of the somewhat artificial exclamation: "Ghosts! the couple from the conservatory has risen again!" was different on each occasion. The first time, she isolated it from the content, made an elaborate gesture, seemed unable to get away from its inherent theatricality, redeeming herself immediately afterwards by the tragic resolution of her exit into the room where the boy awaited her—an exit which seemed somehow to be the march ahead of a soul stricken to its roots and yet determined

to take up life, to go on; there was in her movement the silent courage of those who look Fate in the face and brace themselves to bear the long littlenesses, the daily stabs of an existence become grey and difficult and perilous. In her second performance of the part, Duse changed the exclamation: "Ghosts!" lowered its key, thought it aloud, made it seem natural and, therefore, inevitable.

Her treatment of the end of the play also showed variation. Faced by the livid, stiff body of her son who had just collapsed into idiocy, she did not do quite the same thing. The first afternoon she knelt by his side, repeating his name in a hushed, broken plaint, like a whisper from beyond the grave, in a tone that could never hope to reach his ear and had, in fact, given up such a hope, so that it was a poignant, final elegy over the dead mind. At the other matinee, Duse stood distractedly before him, trying to say his name and able to articulate only the first syllables, as though choked with horror. Such diversities any observer of Duse's work was sure to



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come upon. And this is what is meant by saying that she left room for improvisation. Freedom existed supremely in her acting—freedom sustained by a certain uncompromising authority.

Still on the track of her secret, we can attempt an inventory of her qualities. We can note that she had the obvious appurtenances of the great actress developed to their utmost extent. First, gracefulness and flexibility of movement, the sense of attitude, raised here to such a high consciousness that they were as revealing, sometimes more explicit, than words; her progress across the stage was almost winged, it seemed a miracle of spirit over flesh, and in her poses there was the arrested motion, the beauty of line, which we are accustomed to find only in the finest plastic art—in Greek bas-reliefs or the marbles of the Renaissance. Then she had a voice that was resonant and fresh and full of light and shade; that became dreamy, evocatory when it dealt with the hidden, that turned dry with irony, that swept down into a sudden elemental depth when pas-



sion was to be expressed. She had the lucid diction which is always a sign of intelligence, a putting of the player's self in the auditor's place, a desire to reach him. To those who were not well versed in Italian, Duse was more easily understandable than her fellow players, although she sometimes spoke twice as fast. She had hands which moved in a rhythm charged with meaning, hands which, quite apart from their perfection of form, had a further quality, seemed to possess a life of their own and be separate vessels of the spirit. Finally she had a mask, full of transparence and significant shadows, which, by a quiver of the lip, by a flash in the eye, told us more than pages of script and exacted from us the tribute of that closest attention without which we could reap no reward.

But beyond these external gifts, graces, and acquisitions there was the thing which we fundamentally look for in all art—the thing that lies beyond facility and technique and which we can only call personality. It is a fallacy

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to claim that in each part the great actor metamorphoses himself, achieves a transformation, is a quick-change artist. Under no matter what felicitous outer disguise, what intelligent outfitting of himself to suit circumstance and mood in a rôle, the great actor preserves his essential self, his profound instincts and reactions and choices, and is great by virtue of something indestructible in himself, a personal vision to which men turn with their everlasting thirst for the new word, the message that has not been heard before. We shall find in the great actor's work a personal quality as authentic and continuous as we feel in the fine creations of plastic art. Valasquez remains relentlessly himself, whether he is painting a brocade or a human face; in the same way the interpreter of genius wears this or that part as a mere outer garment on the pondering, seeking, urgent reality which is his spirit. He provides us with the stimulating spectacle of that phenomenon, forever incalculable and yet unchangeable, which we name personality.

Duse's art was, first and last, an exposition

of this principle. The quality of her imagination, of her intuition, of her reflection, the force or delicacy of her emotion, these were what held audiences since she first appeared. By her intelligence and that aristocracy of mind which is good taste, by her precise sense of proportion, we were shown the most elusive shades, the values of situation. By her sensitiveness—that sensitiveness which found gestures for the expression of feeling which touched you straight on the heart—emotion was portrayed, with the last defenceless sincerity we call poetry. She turned plays that had moments of dullness and artificiality into breathless reality because she herself was so unalterably real. They became expositions of the human soul because out of her wisdom, out of what she had endured and observed and divined, she filled them with an unfailing, vigilant humanity. It was this intimacy with the heart's truth which long ago made her Camille a real person evolved far beyond Dumas' somewhat theatrical figure. She brought to dramatists a precious unearned increment—the experience

of her own spirit. She endowed their characters with an extra dimension.

Her Mrs. Alving, in "Ghosts," possessed the clear-sightedness, the irony and fortitude of Ibsen's heroine, and then much more. Duse gave us a Mrs. Alving who resumed in herself everything that we mean when we say mother love, who by a thousand different implications made us realize the depth, the tenacity, of that emotion and its leaping possibility for joy and pain; who through the lighting up of her face at her son's entrance or her smiling evocation of his childhood revealed to us the richness of her heart's treasure.

Again, her "Lady from the Sea," not exact in the sense of visibly fitting into the play, of being Ibsen's neurotic young woman lingering over a past shock to her feelings, was rather an incarnation of other-worldliness, a delicate and brooding and haunted figure, and seemed a symbol of the human soul fearful of the unknown yet longing for the unattainable, striving to adapt itself to the narrow bonds of

circumstance and yet pursued by that dangerous temptation which forever assails the idealistic and stretches out before them a shining Eldorado—the escape from reality. Here there was no psychopathic morbidity, very little passion, but only the finer, purified emotions, nostalgia, remembrance and a quivering search for the right, for truth. To quarrel with this mystical rendering of the part was like quarrelling with Duse's refusal to make up—a futile proceeding, since, as she left the play behind her in pursuance of her own vision and very probably the dramatist's concealed meaning, she seemed to tell us that we could take her or leave her; that was our concern, not hers.

In "Cosi Sia" we found Duse once more mystically enlarging the playwright's premise and, with her sense of the oneness of all life, making it universal. Out of a story which, though feelingly enough, rather baldly outlines the long Gethsemane and passion and crucifixion of a mother, Duse built a greatly imaginative "mystery," transcended the limitations of

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the play, turned bareness into simplicity, and converted the mother into a figure that had sweep, significance, and eternity.

It is a commonplace that the art of the great actor dies with him and that though posterity remembers the names of a Garrick, a Siddons, a Rachel, or a Booth, there must be a nostalgia about this memory which seeks to perpetuate an excellence and an intensity forever lost. To translate one art into the terms of another is a hazy undertaking, and the written records which seek to describe the special qualities of some departed player, no matter how skillful or rapturous they may be in appreciation, can only provide a faint echo of the living presence, with its instantaneous, elusive changes, which once thrilled and held vast audiences.

So it must be with any attempt to record the art and personality of such a human being as Eleonora Duse. To recapture the peculiar tone of her work is a harder task than an attempt to represent some less recondite, fine and differing talent; and Sarah Bernhardt's more

obvious theatricalism could be painted in fewer and bolder strokes.

For Duse's gift was esoteric by nature of its infinite refinement in feeling; it was lonely because it concerned itself with essential truth; it was almost a negation of acting, in the ordinary sense, because while acting may be vulgarly described as "showing off" with a taint of egoism as its base, Duse's acting was a patient and fervent effort at "showing." Her selfless revelation of emotion, her terrible candour, which insisted on spiritual values and discarded all picturesque, self-pitying or self-exalting tricks, were something new and apart in the theatre. This quiet veracity of hers was often misunderstood, derided as a pose, or simply overlooked in favour of more brilliant exhibitions.

Yet, with the death of Duse, artists in all countries and in every art, felt a sudden sense of orphanage, as if one of the forces by which they had lived, by which they had believed and hoped, suddenly failed them. It was almost as if they were to be denied the recurrent and



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varying wonders of sunset, the melody of autumn wind, or the far-flung turbulence of foamy seas. Duse somehow had become a symbol—an incarnation of the pure passion which shapes life into art. Her influence on her time was not confined to workers in the theatre; it was curiously extended to all who were in love with beauty and who sought to capture in durable form some vivid passing appearance in life's shifting pattern. Painters, dancers, musicians, writers, as well as actors, found in her a source of inspiration, some touchstone of integrity and perfection which made their own task seem more worth while, although more difficult. Their emotion towards Duse had in it respect for the exquisite flame they saw in her, for the self-discipline and rightness of her technique, together with a protective pity for an instrument so frailly attuned, so at the mercy of life's inscrutable forces, so unendingly responsive to the splendours and cruelties of experience.

To those of us who were present at Duse's "Ave atque Vale," her last tour in America, it was plain enough that she had transcended the



theatre; that in loneliness and grief and meditation, this particular soul had become detached into a solitude so much its own that common human preoccupation with effect, with conquest and triumph, had been unconsciously discarded. So it was that a critic, here and there, honestly recorded his opinion that the spark and prodigality which spell greatness were absent from Duse's acting; so it was that our most talented tragedian confessed that what moved him was not Duse's acting, but her curtain calls. True enough that in those brief appearances of this fragile, grey-haired woman, bowing her thanks to applauding audiences with such a singular compound of tragic humility and inherent pride, one caught the most vivid glimpse of the suffering and remote spirit that was Eleonora Duse at the age of sixty-six. Art, after all, is a game, the splendid toy of exuberant and gifted people; here was a human being so inclining towards the absolute that games had, perhaps, become impediments rather than adjuncts towards that

finality which is the goal of the spiritually evolved.

Whether or not Duse's art lost by this detachment of hers, one who did not see her in her prime, but observed only her last public appearances, is not competent to judge. There was, at any rate, an unforgettable overtone in her work, something hauntingly different from usual acting, which was contributed by her very aloofness. An impression of finality, the sort of melancholy induced by things remembered rather than actual, a translation of life, clear yet distant, like some pageant reflected in the depths of a lucid and isolated pool.

Mr. Stark Young, who has written about the Italian actress with such brilliant discernment and rare emotion, observes that "Duse suggested perpetually a state of music." There was, then, a special fluidity and harmony about Duse in her last appearances as Mrs. Alving in "Ghosts," as the peasant mother in "Cosi Sia" or as the heroine of "Citta Morta," which elevated and charmed us, so surely was she resolving her own chords. To catch this music

required an attentive and well-trained ear; there was nothing easy of approach about the art of a woman who had herself conquered difficulties with such stern exaltation. To know Duse at all, either on or off the stage, required a certain novitiate, a certain shedding of vulgarity and commonplace, a certain apprenticeship in truth and sensibility. For although Duse was the incarnation of the eternal feminine, in delicacy, in intuition, in passionate devotion, in instinctive recognition of the eternal necessity for tears—*lacrimæ rerum*—there was yet, behind her tenderness and understanding, her grace in living, her instant quivering response to beauty or pain, a certain steel-like will, a masculine resolution, something unbreakable, relentlessly active, rigorous in contempt for the second-rate and the platitudinously facile or unworthy.

Stuff for press agents Duse could not be. One remembers with what tranquil irony she listened to a statement which was to be given out to the newspapers as her only public interview in this country—a statement in which

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she had been rather blatantly misquoted. "Too many I's," she murmured, and with sublime unconscious humour added: "It sounds like a *prima donna*."

Duse's humility was no pose; it was the natural bent of a mind too cultivated and balanced to endure extravagance or to tolerate self-deception. When she saw herself quoted as stating: "I have come to America because I felt I had a message for you here," she drew a pencil through the line and wrote: "I have come here not to teach, but to learn." After seeing the Moscow Art Players give a performance at Al Jolson's Theatre, she said to me: "It was perfection; and it made me feel I must never act again."

The sincerity, the self-torturing abasement which were part of Duse's genius were touching to those who realized the struggles and the triumphs which had marked her way through life.

To separate Duse as a human being from Duse as an actress is difficult, so much did her acting owe to her personality.

In this personality, there was, first of all, racial inheritance. There was, for instance, that natural warmth both in tragic imagination and in gaiety which is the birthright of her people. She had the Latin instinct for living, the Latin delight in homely and graceful and happy things, the pleasure in flowers, in children, in sunshine and rippling waters, in laughter, fellowship and common courtesy, in wine fresh from brown vineyards or songs at evening when pointed blue hills rest clear against a glowing sky. The very visual aspect of her country moulded her with its smiling serenity, its labour so close to the womb of earth, its simplicity and richness, the grave proportion of its palaces and towns, the tinted sweep and harmony of its hilly distances. Her mind had this same precision of outline bathed in a coloured and romantic atmosphere.

And how much of the ancient wisdom of southern civilization was hers: that poetic acceptance of the facts of life, that ardent honesty and logic which we catch in the eye of a passing Lombardy peasant, in the piercing lu-

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city of Virgil and Dante, or in a marble head by Mino da Fiesole, where we find realism no less realistic for being lyrically conveyed. The Latin belief in the positive, its reverence for the actual, were Duse's inheritance and also the Latin capacity for representing the positive and the actual with delicate poetry, with a respect which insists on beauty of expression. Latin, I have written, but would it not be better to say Mediterranean, for Rome learned direct and profound statement from Greece and it was Sappho who said:

“Evening thou that bringest all that  
bright morning scattered; thou bring-  
est the sheep, the goat, the child back  
to her mother.”

It was Theodorides who wrote:

“I am the tomb of one shipwrecked;  
but sail thou; for even while we per-  
ished, the other ships sailed over the  
sea.”

And Theognis who sang:

“Of all things not to be born into the world is best, nor to see the beams of the keen sun; but being born, as swiftly as may be to pass the gates of Hades, and lie under a heavy heap of earth.”

While Bianor inscribed the epitaph:

“This man, inconsiderable, mean, yes, a slave—this man was loved and was lord of another’s soul.”

The secret of such expression, such bare truth and beauty, lies in a clear-eyed sense of tragic reality, a closeness to the very beating heart of life, acceptance of the natural and inevitable clothed in natural and inevitable form.

This spirit, this æsthetic approach were Duse’s, this classic poignancy and restraint. How far from the hysterical escapes from fact, the extravagances, exaggerations, and buffooneries of Northern races which are less balanced,

less healthily children of the earth and cannot achieve a point of view, sane even in despair.

So it was that a human being, so nervously sensitive as to be the prey of every passing mood, so haunted by foreboding, by the pain of existence, by the endless struggle and effort of humanity, yet achieved by virtue, perhaps, of the basic sanity and order of her race, a balance, some lofty transcending of suffering, some last acceptance and peace which were reflected in her work and brought to it that stamp of finality which we find in the best classic art.

Duse's audiences were touched by this spirit; they were hushed as people become at some symbolic ceremony; they came to gape at a celebrity but insensibly they forgot their sensational errand as they were caught up by the detached loveliness, the abstraction and austerity of her acting.

Italian, Duse was in her combined imagination and common sense; yet she was strangely universal. The surface sophistication of a cultivated mind is not only what I mean; it is true that by dint of hard labour and perseverance



and her own immense intelligence she had, to an unusual degree, assimilated foreign cultures, foreign arts and ways of thought. But beyond and above this, she was universal because of her limitless sympathy, her burning knowledge of life and of the human heart. To see Duse play was to realize what this woman knew. All of us have blind spots in our sensitiveness. Duse had none. She understood love—the love of a mother for her child, love between the sexes, passion, affection, nostalgia, despair. All primitive strong feeling was hers and all the delicate refinements of sensibility as well. She understood hate, hunger, irony; she understood tenderness, faith, and renunciation. This intuition she gave with both hands, offering herself as a sacrifice, weaving her own experience in a supreme melody, as the poet does. Her acting was living poetry. She moved before us intent on some sublime errand and her goings to and fro seemed messages from distant places.

She was so Protean as to suggest one of Na-

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ture's forces, and, if she had not been so nobly controlled, might have been as destructive as she was creative. There were volcanoes in her and there were depths of peace. Between them, she oscillated like a highly sensitized pendulum and it was not possible to be long in her company without realizing the incessant struggle within her, the huge opposed principles contending, the divine discontent, the suffering and uneasiness with which genius pays for its emotional and imaginative equipment. She was a creature of opposites—enduring yet fiery, gentle yet relentless. She had what Whitman calls: "The pure, extravagant, yearning, questioning artist's face"—a face sometimes furrowed with age, again young by the flare of life in it, a face so infinitely changeable in expression as to become fluid in one's memory and yet definitely, in its broad, strongly marked pallor, the very embodiment of a tragic mask. Most noticeable of all was a certain unity in her, a certain poise and distinction oddly combined with elemental fire and intensity, which one

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felt alike when one met her in a small room or watched her on the stage.

To the literal and pettily conscious, Duse's mind, her imaginative needs, her emotional response, her idealism might perhaps have seemed extravagant, humourless and not sufficiently aware of the necessity for conformity. But those who thirst for the rare and significant will remember with emotion her beautiful tendency to poetize, which cropped up in the most ordinary conversation, her quick and leaping imagery, her instinct for turning everything—even intercourse with others—into art. They will realize that such sensitiveness and intuition come seldom into the world, such creative tenderness and wisdom do not often afford refuge to spirits baffled in their search for some exalting reality.

Duse, in her last years, was seeking ultimate truth in religion as she had so ardently sought it in her art; her fidelity and passion had touched many people watching her for many years in the theatre; her single-mindedness was as moving as the unconscious absorption of a

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child; there was always in her approach to work and living a heartrending purity of intention which imposed itself on others, so that subterfuge and self-seeking vanished in her presence.

The poet is the searcher after the infinite; he is concerned with ultimate reality; he is played on and tempted by feeling, by the beauty and wonder of appearance, more keenly and unendingly than the average human; experience is his mistress whom he adores and fears and yet courts. So does he plunge headlong into emotion, not out of sensationalism, but because he is seeking the final truth which he dimly knows to be inexorably waiting somewhere at the other side of delight, exaltation and disaster. He is a victim of life because he is its lover—a victim, condemned by his nature and faculties to suffer publicly, *pro bono publico*. About Duse there was this totality, this heroic abandonment of all pretence, this sacrifice to truth and faith in living. At the end, the poet is life's conqueror. Broken himself, he has yet captured the pearl of wisdom. Much has been

turned to ashes by those flaring, mixed flames of his youth which, through the very dross they have consumed, converge at last into a single light, shining before men, beckoning them towards the abode where the eternal are.



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## MRS. FISKE

MRS. FISKE, like every fine artist, has a secret, and one which, as always, is directly dependent on personality. Duse had a secret, and so had Réjane. Duse's secret was, at the end, her religious influence, the blessing cast upon us by her crystal-clear divination, her exquisite sympathy and the austere integrity of her spirit. Réjane's magic, as Yvette Guilbert's, lay in a tragi-comic, realistic facing of life. Toulouse-Lautrec's cartoons and Forain's etchings have this quality; they exude a certain large, inclusive vitality, a healthy appetite for and acceptance of character, but their sudden strokes of satire are the fierce defensive parries of temperaments wounded by the vulgarities, the villainies, the ineptitudes of existence.

Mrs. Fiske, compared with Réjane and Guilbert, seems more exclusively a comedian. In this she is very American. Perhaps she is *the*

American attitude intellectualized; the resolute American habit of humour has, in her, been transmuted into an unflagging wit. She never stops her play, as would Réjane or Gilbert, to hint, almost moralistically, at darker elements, to show the hideous painted face of vice, the wan masks of deprivation and despair; she is too American for that, too Yankee—yes, too Puritan. The New England propensity for suppression of all emotion survives to-day in our deliberate cheerfulness, our insistence on the trivial and external and common sensible, our terror of any dangerous plunges below the surface of things.

Mrs. Fiske, then, is not cruel, probing, poignant like the French comic artists; she is simply amazingly funny. She is funny almost every second; there is no let up in her action; when she has no line to speak she will make a gesture or stand in a certain way or twist her face. Her principle is continuity of effect. Her art is an escape from life as determined and sustained as jazz or Charlie Chaplin's

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work. Her evasion is brilliant and complete and unshakable.

What intrigues us in Mrs. Fiske is perhaps this conviction of hers—certainly racial, but in her so precisely expressed—that fireworks are better than fire. We are enthralled by the definiteness of her premise and by her ability to keep the “show” up. Her work in “*Helena’s Boys*,” for instance, was a miracle in this particular kind of “continuous performance.” Here she had only the slightest of stalking horses, the most tenuous of light comedies, with few good lines and but one uproarious situation; but she rode it to a triumphant finish by establishing herself, her mood, her vibration, at once and never letting go until the final curtain.

On whatever play, whether a production with lamentable holes in it, or such a compact and trim piece of foolery as St. John Ervine’s “*Mary, Mary*,” Mrs. Fiske manages to impress the stamp of distinction. And this is because wit, although infinitely sociable, is intrinsically aristocratic. The rapier has ever been its sym-



bol and its action is delicate fencing, the opposite of buffoonery's heavy bludgeoning. Wit is reflective, discreet, remote; it smiles where others laugh; it walks with delicate discrimination and wears red heels and a curled white wig. Mrs. Fiske belongs spiritually in Sheridan's comedies and would have waved a wicked fan at the Hôtel de Rambouillet. She has the brittle grace and exactitude of Mozart's melodies. One thinks her capable of Madame de Pompadour's dying speech to the priest leaving the bedside, "One moment, Monsieur le Curé, and we can take our departure together." She has the indifference, the elegance, and the intrepid frivolity of the eighteenth century. She has its instinct for the "becoming," in both senses of the word, its religion of the *à propos*. She is, like all wits, superbly civilized.

And she wields the rare rapier to tilt at its eternal antagonist—sentimentality. Indeed, she is always curiously "on guard" in this respect. She will give us no commonplace exhibition of emotions, hardly any emotion except gaiety. She will not bathe us in any comfort-

able glow of sentiment. She will not relax from her light walking of a tight rope perilously distant from the earth as we know it. Her art—inasmuch as it is fireworks and not fire—is concerned with the artificial, and is, in this sense, art for art's sake. She will not give us life; but she will give us, presented with beautiful self-exacting technique, a good time.

A good time we had when she strode upon the scene in "Mary, Mary," clad in rubber boots, sou'wester, and dishevelled evening dress and produced her account of a night out in an open rowboat with a disgruntled elderly beau. A good time was again had by all during the moment she pretended to become much intoxicated, for her son's benefit and to his horror, in "Helena's Boys." Mrs. Fiske, unlike most women and like every real histrionic humourist, is willing to make a caricature of herself; Beatrice Lillie, that subtle artist, shares this glory with her. Some of us, struck by this aspect, may see in Mrs. Fiske only a divinely inspired, gorgeously ridiculous clown; others are fascinated by her idiosyncrasies, her cele-

brated staccato, her magnetic "difference." Still others realize what thought and cultivation are in her work, what mingled application and ease in her method.

One would trade all the broad humours of the typical American farce, or the comedy of manners which is, interestingly enough, growing up among us, to hear Mrs. Fiske rap out, with classic incisiveness, such a line as:

"Well—why do you—all—stand there—like stalactites?"

That is because Mrs. Fiske has a precious thing—style. Style, we are told, is the man. Mrs. Fiske's style grows out of herself. Its clear outline is the result of her sharp intelligence; its economy springs from her concentration on essentials. She plays with lines as a juggler with knives, and has his trick of gradually accelerated motion, so that her comic climaxes are whirlwinds worked up with almost incredible pace.

But when we have admired her technique we have not really got to the root of the matter. Granted that Mrs. Fiske is a clown, that she

is an eccentric, that she is a finished actress; beyond that she is a person. She ranks first in the American theatre not because she is clever, or educated, or experienced, or charged with vitality, although all these elements must have contributed to her success; she emerges because, like Duse, Réjane, and Guilbert, she is a personality in the sense of being a point of view.

She baffles and leads us on. We cannot play on her nor learn her every stop. But she can play on us. She is, as I have said, because of her wit, mentally an aristocrat; she is also, thanks to her wit, sociable. She is never, if an architecturally faulty metaphor may be allowed, above the gallery. Humour is a common element; the gallery plunges in after her.

And yet, she is odd and alone, which endears her to the crowd. She moves in her own orbit and compels others to revolve around her. We conclude that if we feel a tonic glow on rising from one of her performances, this is to be laid to the fact that we have received the electric shock of a definite philosophy. No significant artist, whether of the stage or not, is without

one. Mrs. Fiske makes her own world. And that is a universe founded on a peculiar refusal. "We must laugh about it," she seems to say, "in order not to cry." She laughs at others with kindly aloofness; she laughs at herself systematically and without giving quarter. But her creed's result is, fatally, that she excludes more than she admits.

Is it for this reason that a sense of waste, of opportunity unseized, hovers about Mrs. Fiske? We are likely to feel that her plays are not quite up to her. She leaves the great parts so conspicuously alone. True, there were the days of Becky Sharp and Hedda Gabler and Tess. Much water has flowed under the bridge since then, however, and Mrs. Fiske does not attempt Mrs. Erlynne in "Lady Windermere's Fan" or Candida or Lady Macbeth or Hecuba in "The Trojan Women."

To which complaint, it will be objected that Mrs. Fiske is a comedian. No, she has made herself a comedian. She has turned her back on her own Protean diversity and, in later

years, has left certain fields untilled and unharvested.

She could have worn many dresses; nevertheless, she has made a choice and omitted all but a few glittering threads in the stuff of life. Out of her bright plunder, a gay and unique and fantastic cloak is woven and worn with an extravagant and irresistible bravado that has gallantry and redeems itself—if it needs redemption—by an altruistic intention to enliven and please beholders.

Which is Mrs. Fiske's secret, her character, and her fate.



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## YVETTE GUILBERT

YVETTE GUILBERT, when she came to New York, produced a sensation by her performances. Discouraged dramatic critics languishing under the strain of sitting through much unreal and conventional drama untruthfully and conventionally acted, sat up in astonishment, rubbed their eyes, and leaned forward incredulously. Here was an artist who dared to take as her material simple little songs, the ballads of the French people through the centuries, and then proceeded to make out of them profound human documents, vivid poetry, tiny dramas of unforgettable intensity. It was as if one of our actresses had taken "Clerk Saunders," "Comin' through the Rye," and "Old King Cole" and made us laugh, and cry, and wonder, and love, and die with her as she interpreted these things for us. Yvette Guilbert's performance was very graceful and quiet and perfectly assured; and while it seemed smil-

ingly to ask us for nothing, it received our deep and startled admiration.

Fortunately for us, this actress does not allow herself to be handicapped by the idea of perpetuating a "manner" which has happened to please previous publics. She is, one realizes, the enemy of mannerisms, of gallery plays, of cheap and easy personal thrusts at the susceptibilities of her audience. She is therefore at liberty to exercise her extraordinary versatility, to penetrate into the most varied realms of interpretation, to paint for us in a few sure, brilliant strokes whole periods, whole scenes, whole characters. Like Sarah Bernhardt, she is a joyous worker and all the unusual force of her personality goes into what she does. Her work is full of fine electric sparks. On the other hand, there is not about her head the sickly, self-admiring halo which radiates from the type of actress who has been rendered irretrievably self-conscious by a sentimental public.

Yvette Guilbert has always been a highly specialized artist, but she has always managed to be supreme in her own field. To this, Mr.



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## YVETTE GUILBERT

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Arthur Symons bears witness in an essay which gives us a vivid and sympathetic picture of the period when this Frenchwoman sang the gutter songs of Paris in a manner which "has never been seen on the music-hall stage since the beginning." If only for the pleasure of comparison with her present work, it is worth while to quote Mr. Symons' description of Yvette Guilbert in her earlier phase:

"She is tall, thin, a little angular, most winningly and girlishly awkward, as she wanders on to the stage with an air of vague distraction. Her shoulders droop; her arms hang limply. She doubles forward in an automatic bow in response to thunders of applause; and that curious smile breaks out along her lips and rises and dances in her bright-blue eyes, wide open in a sort of child-like astonishment. . . . She wears a trailing dress, striped yellow and pink, without ornament. Her arms are covered with long black gloves. The applause stops suddenly; there is a hush of suspense; she is beginning to sing. And with the first note you realize the difference between Yvette Guil-

bert and all the rest of the world. . . . It is not merely that she can do pure comedy, that she can be frankly, deliciously gay. . . . Her gamut in the purely comic is wide; with an inflection of the voice, a bend of that curious, long thin body which seems to be embodied gesture, she can suggest, she can portray, the humour that is dry, ironical, coarse (I will admit), unctuous even. Her voice can be sweet or harsh; it can chirp, lilt, chuckle, stutter; it can moan or laugh, be tipsy or distinguished. Nowhere is she conventional; nowhere does she resemble any other French singer. Voice, face, gesture, pantomime, all are different, all are purely her own. . . . But where she is most herself is in a manner of tragic comedy which has never been seen on the music-hall stage since the beginning. It is the profoundly sad and essentially serious comedy which one sees in Forain's drawings, those rapid outlines which, with the turn of a pencil, give you the whole existence of those base sections of society which our art in England is mainly forced to ignore. . . . A great impersonal artist . . . she af-

fects one all the time as being, after all, removed from what she sings of; an artist whose sympathy is an instinct, a divination. There is something automatic in all fine histrionic genius, and I find some of the charm of the automaton in Yvette Guilbert. . . . Trick or instinct, there it is, the power to make you feel intensely; and that is precisely the final test of a great dramatic artist."

In her way of being absolutely "different from the rest of the world" Yvette Guilbert has persisted. The minute she walked on to the stage of the Lyceum Theatre, dressed in a mediæval costume which was a perfectly satisfying work of art in itself, one caught the quick, arresting shock of her personality. But she wasted no time in preliminaries, her interest was neither for herself nor for her audience, but for what she was going to do. This businesslike insistence on the matter in hand, this going straight to the point, is a thoroughly Gallic characteristic and one which makes for much of the fine impersonal work of the French stage.

Yvette Guilbert, after having told us in a few explanatory sentences what she is going to interpret for us, strikes an attitude in the centre of the stage—very deliberately and intently, and with none of that nervous fear of being too dramatic which makes lesser actresses hurry through their business, slurring effects, throwing away opportunities, and generally sacrificing drama on the altar of self-consciousness. Yvette Guilbert is fearless' with the strong fearlessness of an unusual dramatic imagination. She does things no one else has ever done before, but she makes us see at once that she is triumphantly right and that everyone else has been pitifully wrong. In her manner of walking, of gesturing, of intoning, there is always something unexpected, a very deep originality—and yet never an affectation. She is not executing nimble, eccentric music in order to astonish us; she is, herself, very simply, and almost unconsciously one would say, an entirely new and unique instrument. There is, of course, an enormous amount of intellect, of careful building up of effects, behind her work.

She has abandoned, together with the long black gloves and the *canaille* songs, that curious immobility which so impressed the critics of her early period. Her gestures are distinct, telling, and full of chosen meaning, and they vary according to the content of her songs from a strangely impressive artificiality to the most simple and universal naturalness. As a purely technical detail, it is interesting to notice how she always makes the gesture before speaking the line which it is meant to illustrate. Her science is deep, deep enough never to appear unless one probes for it. In her technique she is deliberate, wonderfully controlled, and at the same time brilliant like a dancer in perfect time with the music.

All the intuition which she carried into her study of the gutter, she has kept and uses in her present study of periods. When she sings the "Satires" of the Louis XV era she is as insolent, amusing, careless, and conscienceless as the age. She is smiling at emptiness and dropping mocking curtsies to an unexplainable and purposeless universe. She has seen death

at the bottom of the wine cup and she waves the glass between her jewelled fingers and makes cruel little jests in a friendly, companionable way. Her gaiety is of the same convention as her rouge and powdered hair and patches; all are the trappings of rank and part of a great lady's smiling religion of artifice. This wit, this graceful amiability, are things demanded by a highly civilized social intercourse: things put on, Yvette Guilbert makes us see, as mechanically and effortlessly as a glove.

But it is when she takes folk songs, the popular language of France for many centuries, with their wise saws and healthy franknesses and little malicious touches, that she finds wonderful material for the realist she fundamentally is.

In "Le Lien Serré," (one of the most justly famed songs in her *répertoire*) we get the perfection of her method in this popular domain. She sits before us and is the angry, sour scold. Who will ever forget her crabbed, furious, unquestionable sewing? And yet behind the clear-

cut, almost classical comedy of her sapient comments on marriage and her cynical warnings to the young against this mistake of matrimony, she subtly instills something of real tragedy, of conscious failure in life, of the bitter permanent sadness which lies behind all wrinkles, even evil ones. Truly, as Mr. Symons says, "The art of Yvette Guilbert is of that essentially modern kind which, even in a subject supposed to be comic, a subject we are accustomed to see dealt with, if dealt with at all, in burlesque, seeks mainly for the reality of things—and reality, if we get deep enough into it, is never comic."

At the opposite end of character is the young girl who is expostulating with her mother, "*Ma mère, il faut me marier.*" Yvette Guilbert, here, is youth—impatient, petulant, cruel, still wonderfully, ridiculously childish, seeing things without humour, in funny little passionate short cuts. It is a masterpiece of comedy, that finest kind of comedy which is founded on exaggerated truth. So is the song of the wizened, worried scissor grinder who sings his



daughter's misfortunes with an irresistibly pathetic, irresistibly comic return at the end of each couplet to the "Sizz—Sizz—Sizz" of his wheel.

Yvette has the intellectual courage of her race. Her gaze is unfalteringly clear. Her tragedies become more heartrendingly tragedies because she is wise and honest enough to show them, not as isolated and abnormal facts, but as strands closely woven into the entire web of life, as clouds that frequently have an undoubted and inseparable comic lining.

It is a temptation to multiply examples of Yvette Guilbert's mastery and versatility in this sphere. If we glance at her method in these songs, we will find that her gestures are simple, familiar, and, except when they are emphasizing a comic effect (she has a genius for humour in gesture), unnoticeable in themselves; marvellously wedded, in fact, to the content of the ballads.

What she can do in a more picturesque direction she shows us in "Le Joli Mois de Mai." Since time immemorial in France, May Day



has been observed as a semireligious, semipopular festival. The parish priest, followed by the children of the village, goes from house to house, asking for alms; and as the little procession passes through the fields and flowering orchards, it sings the ballad of the spring:

*"C'est le joli mois de mai,  
C'est le joli mois de mai."*

Yvette Guilbert is priest and children, by turns. Her voice is, at first, deep, robust, convinced, and convincing; her walk is heavy, slow, and benevolent; her hands are folded pompously across her stomach. One sees the priest's wrinkled blue eyes, and fat sunburnt neck, his thick-soled shoes and the gold of his ill-fitting chasuble glinting in and out between the trees. Then, in a minute, the voice becomes nasal, crystalline, a reedy little thread of melody, and the face wide-eyed and intent with the serious expressionlessness of childhood. And suddenly there are rows of uneven heads, small brown hands clutching long candles or

green branches, and one hears the clatter of very thin short legs stumbling down a cobbled street. With her usual rightness of effect, Yvette carries this song off the stage and the chorus comes back at us from the wings in childish shrillness. She is making it float through a distance of almond blossoms and wild rose bushes.

*"C'est le joli mois de mai—  
C'est—le—jo—li—mois—de—mai."*

It is all France, all tradition, and a great deal of Roman Catholicism.

But Yvette Guilbert's special triumph is when she approaches the mediæval. How eagerly and with what a sense of spiritual proprietorship she seizes on the grotesque element of Gothic art and makes us smile affectionately at its *naïveté*, and weep at its thin and angular pathos, and tremble with unholy terror at its bizarre and forbidding outlines. She has found in the golden legends the ideal medium for her special talent with its sense of contrasts, with

its capacity for simple tragedy, for intensely dramatic *récitative*, for strange, twisted, passionate effects. In the low songs of Paris she doubtless discerned that same sudden, unpremeditated "tragic comedy" which peeps out at us from the niches and convolutions of the Gothic;—tragedy with a hideous grin on its face;—beauty in fantastic ugliness.

I may be forgiven, I hope, and not termed extravagant, if I say that, in these songs, Yvette Guilbert's voice—the way she produces it and makes it sound—has in it a feeling more like the emotion that went to create a gargoyle than anything in art since the thirteenth century. It is part of her exquisite sense of fitness that she should discover—I might say invent—tones of voice, gestures, expressions, pitched in the same key as her subject.

There is a ballad about "Saint Nicolas," the children's saint, and how he rescues and revenges three little boys who have been cruelly illtreated by a fiendish butcher. This butcher, in fact, has cut them up, salted them, and put them in the storing vat with his pork. After

seven years, Saint Nicolas appears, shatters the butcher with a glance, and raises the three little boys intact from the pork vat. Each of the older two makes an appropriate remark, and the younger one, as he rises from his salty bed, rubs his eyes, smiles rather sleepily, looks about him, and says, confidently:

*"Je croyais être au paradis."*

The piping voice, the soft little grin, were irresistible. Yvette Guilbert has the feeling for childhood of a Boutet de Monvel, the same humorous, delighted, tender comprehension.

Then there is the ballad of "Le Mauvais Riche" with its mediæval sense of the wrath of God striking the offender suddenly. Madame Guilbert makes the note of doom sound louder and louder through the poem like a great bell growing more and more distinct and booming out at last in deafening, terrible culmination at the end. Halfway through the song there is a line describing a moonlit staircase which she takes and makes a jewel out

of—a jewel of suggestion. It becomes a clear implacable chord, struck in the minor, and pre-luding swift tragedy.

But the two greatest of the cycle, both in content and in Yvette's interpretation, are "La Naissance du Christ," and "La Mort du Christ." It is here that her feeling for the piteous, the awe-ful, and the dramatic has its fullest opportunity, and it is here that her technique becomes a thing of inspired perfection. With an eye out to the delicate shades of real suffering and emotion experienced by the personages of these two dramas, she yet appreciates tradition enough to want to make us feel that they *are* distinctly *personages*. She is resurrecting for us not the real, original tragedy of Calvary or the drama of Bethlehem; but, with a modern passion for complication, she is also subtly infusing into her interpretation the *naïve*, picturesque spirit of mediæval church drama with its paradise and hell fires, its gilded heavens and horned, dancing devils. There is the stiff ceremonious splendour of a pageant in much of her gesture, the strong, sustained note

of the professional interpreter in her voice; she gives us a sense of the priest or minstrel singing to huge, silent crowds.

“La Naissance du Christ” describes Joseph and Mary searching the streets of Bethlehem for a place where the weary woman can lay her head. The hostels are full. Some of the innkeepers brutally repulse the poor couple. Finally, a more tender-hearted woman gives them a stall in her barn, and the child Christ is born. The drooping, hopeless fatigue of Mary, her courage failing as she wanders through Bethlehem fruitlessly seeking shelter, the careless, insolent answers to her pleadings—these Yvette Guilbert presents with an intensity, a sense of picturesque portraiture which is the intensity and the spirit of portraiture visible in fine Gothic bas-reliefs. It is here we can see how little she is afraid of us—of our superior smile, of our sophisticated comment, of our lack of passionate imagination. The angle of her body as she sketches for us the coarse innkeeper, his heavy frown and raucous voice; her picture of the Virgin’s blind stumbling,

her hands crossed fearfully over her travailing womb—all this is emphasis of a kind that makes fools laugh and wise ones remember the stiff, anguished wooden saints of the thirteenth century, and Oscar Wilde's guidepost to Philistines, "All art is exaggeration."

Who will ever forget this great actress's stroke of genius in this particular ballad? The tone in which she tells us the passing hours of Mary's anguish and uncertainty. It is a refrain that comes at the end of each couplet, bringing with it an almost unbearable sense of suspense and pitiable terror:

*"Il est six heures."*

*"Il est sept heures."*

*"Il est huit heures."*

Each time, Yvette Guilbert made it a high note that was as the ringing of unearthly bells in a sky at dawn; it was a fragile, ingenuous, dramatic warning which blew shrilly and ever so softly like the distant blare of cherubic silver trumpets. There was the poetry of delicate suggestion in it, and it was spiritually akin to



the little coloured flowers Lippo Lippi painted with exquisite care about his madonnas' feet.

In "La Mort du Christ" we have Yvette Guilbert attacking the most difficult possible problem in interpretation and making something very great out of it by the sheer force of an art which is imaginative enough to be absolutely and magnificently impersonal. One hesitation in vision, one touch of self-consciousness, and the thing was ruined, hideous, sacrilegious, small. Profoundly moving, impressive again with the impressiveness of ceremonial, she made one tremble at the tragic force of the thing; but if in this turmoil of feeling one managed, by a supreme effort of the will, to retain one's critical faculty, one's reward was to catch the clear "automatic" beauty of a correct dramatic sense in action.

By what magic of evocation, by what conscious or unconscious relaxing of muscles and drooping of the head, did Yvette make us see in her the crucified Christ? And how "right" it was to intone the whole legend like a Latin litany, so that in the gradual mounting cre-



scendo of it there was a fine implacable note, something of that dominating inevitability of the Catholic creed that stirs and fans the flame of simple faith, causing men to kneel and look up and wait half in rapture, half in terror, for the heaven and hell that are to be.

*"Avant qu'il soit vendredi nuit  
Vous verrez mon corps pendre,  
Vous verrez mes bras étendus  
Sur une croix si grande.*

*"Vous verrez mon chef couronné  
D'une aubépine blanche,  
Vous verrez mes deux mains clouées  
Et mes deux pieds ensemble."*

There was the black cross raised against a livid sky and a drooping, resigned figure bowing his head to the sound of hammer blows.

And then with louder anguish:

*"Vous verrez mon côté percé  
Par un grand coup de lance.  
Vous verrez mon sang découler  
Tout le long de mes membres.*

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*"Vous verrez mon sang ramassé  
Par quatre petits anges.  
Vous verrez ma mère à mes pieds  
Bien triste et bien dolente."*

The whole Middle Ages was in those four little angels. One might have seen them queerly embroidered into some faded tapestry. And there is a mediæval rigidity of suffering about the "*bien triste et bien dolente*" which Yvette Guilbert was very careful to give us.

But here are the thunders of the Almighty, the chaos of nature accompanying the agony of the dying God:

*"Vous verrez la terre trembler  
Et les pierres se fendre,  
Vous verrez la mer flamboyer  
Comme un tison qui flambe.*

*"Les étoiles qui sont au ciel,  
Vous les verrez descendre,  
Verrez la lune et le soleil  
Qui combattront ensemble."*

Motionless, arms outstretched, Yvette Guilbert conveyed to us the terror of the warring

elements with her eyes and with her voice, which seemed to gain the impressive volume of a cathedral organ rolling out solemn, penetrating chords of prophetic music. And so, standing alone on a bare stage, this woman re-created for us the supreme tragedy of mankind.

If one were to analyse Guilbert's genius and try to find out what quality in particular gave it its very extraordinary value, one would, I imagine, seize on her faculty of comprehension. It is not only the fine discrimination of a cultivated mind (a thing so rarely to be found in the happy-go-lucky, undisciplined ranks of American players), but a Heaven-sent, faultless instinct for truth. Truth in character, in situation, in comedy, in tragedy. Her sight is never obstructed or falsified by the rose-coloured lenses of sentimentality or the lurid ones of sensationalism. Gifted with this rare vision, her natural expressive powers are so great that there is for her only one easy step between *seeing* and *being*.

If she is "different," then, it is not through

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a studied set of mannerisms, but through the high quality of her art; through the free and original workings of her flawless taste. For after all, possibly, "taste" is what we must call her genius; taste, the mental quality at the bottom of all characteristic French art. Taste, really, in its widest sense, means just this imaginative understanding of hers, just this ever-vigilant, delicate sense of values, just this kneeling at different shrines in an attitude of fervour which leaves no room for thoughts of self.

It is part of her distinction that, although a singularly magnetic personality, she never trades on her nervous force, which by itself could hold us; that she never panders to any cheap demand for eccentricity. She is too full of the sensible good humour of her race to assume the "interesting" pose of the half-great artist. She is not serious about herself, nor about her effect on us; she is serious about her work. No, let us use the French word and say she is serious about her *play*. All art is play on a magnificent scale, the actor's art more than

any other. A great player means a man or woman whose imaginative resources in this realm of make-believe are the most varied, the most spontaneous, the best sustained. Yvette Guilbert is a wonderful player, an untiring, instinctive one, surprising us and yet convincing us, causing us by her lovely intensity to play with her.

Her play is a thing made up of enthusiasm and calculation, of passionate appreciation and eager research. It is animated by the most vivid æsthetic emotion I think I have ever seen, and it is controlled and shaped by a careful intelligence. Perhaps we are there watching her while she is thus busy amusing herself. If so, she will stop and welcome us with her ready, half-mischievous smile. But then, she will turn from us and play, like all great artists, most joyfully and earnestly and as beautifully as she can, for herself.



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## THE CHAUVE SOURIS

MR. BALIEFF, Director of the Chauve Souris Theatre of Moscow, and Mr. Morris Gest, producer of the enterprise in America, were astute, one would say, as well as artistic. Both realized and subtly advertised the caviar quality of their offering. And a wise move was made by them during their second season in New York when they transferred the show from an ordinary playhouse to a more recondite setting on top of the Century Theatre. The roof auditorium was redecorated by Mr. Remisoff, scenic artist of the Bat Theatre, in the riot of hues characteristic of Russian art and of a steppe-ridden people nostalgic for movement and colour. In the frescoed fairy tale, princes rose on magic carpets over impossible mosques and towers, the note of fantastic exaggeration which is the charm of the Chauve Souris was struck, and one sat there, enclosed in an alien kaleidoscope. Outside, in the lobby,

arched windows presented glimpses of a blue, gold-pricked night city which seemed part of Mr. Balieff's little game, rather than familiar stone and asphalt.

Mr. Balieff, the calm conjuror, his pale clown's face imparting to us a dispassionate consciousness that most of the world is best taken as foolery and none of us so grandly important after all, pulled out from his hat a new series of surprises. This second bill was well up to the first one. From the first were carried over "The Wooden Soldiers" and "Katinka," both permanently enchanting. In "The Wooden Soldiers" there is rhythm and consummate mimicry; in "Katinka" droll *joie de vivre* enough to set us up for a year.

Vitality is really the great stock in trade of these Russian artists—vitality and a happy abandon which Anglo-Saxons would be apt to suspect and would certainly never approximate. In their instinct for play these actors are of course arch-artists. It is because they are really amusing themselves that they are able so vividly to grimace, so gracefully to dance, so

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wholeheartedly to sing. And yet back of this freedom there is in all of them a critical æsthetic mind, a natural taste, ever watchful of effect, emphasizing a note here, exercising restraint there.

Mr. Balieff's method is consistently suggestion. He takes, for instance, an old French ballad like "The King Orders the Drums to Sound" and stages the story of it; this is a slight thread to hang a scene on, one would think. But the legend becomes poignant drama through a beautiful use of light, through significant grouping and economical but portentous gesture; what is more, the spirit of the folk song is conserved so that we have a tragedy of criminal love and death saturated with the *naïve* pomp dear to the popular and childlike imagination. There is almost always a touch of sophisticated humour in the Chauve Souris's approach of any subject, a gentle smiling at the human puppets: Love we may, hope, sing, weep, dance, and even hate and kill. But still we are puppets, infinitely small against a gigantic back-drop, one moment gilded in the



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## THE CHAUVE SOURIS

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impersonal blaze of the footlights, tomorrow thrown quaintly sprawling into the roomy darkness of the wings.

Giant fate *versus* pygmy man—Æschylus and Sophocles discovered this combat to be the authentic subject of drama; to emphasize the generality of the conflict the tragic actors masked themselves apart from personal attention. Gordon Craig, pursuing the same idea, preaches the return to the puppet—conventionalized man, a symbol moving in the pageant of life and death. The Chauve Souris approximates Craig's ideal; its actors are painted away from themselves into bright or lurid dolls. Of egomania there is no trace among these artists; they are willing to sublimate themselves into playthings. They are brilliant dramatic masks lifting us gratefully aloof from the marcel wave of Miss Elsie Ferguson or Miss Billie Burke's favorite colour. The puppet idea is carried out very literally in various numbers where we see actual dolls—wooden soldiers, jerkily moving figures on a music box, Dutch boys and girls that slide off a blue Delft plate

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to go through a little pantomime of awkward love-making and jealousy. Manikins they are, rather than men; through them we are dragged down to our common nature as by the laughter of Rabelais or Molière, and our souls are purged by a sense of insignificance. Always, except in the glimpses of Russian life such as the drinking song of the Black Hussars (a tableau of admirable emotional lighting) the protagonists of the series of playlets are abstractions.

One remembers, among other things, a weird song chanted by curious, hooded black forms outlined in Daumier boldness against a bright doorway. Part of Mr. Balieff's genius is that we never knew who or what these figures were, nor, odder still, did we want to know. Nowadays our imagination is all too rarely piqued, in this way, by the unexplained. Mystery, hints, allusions are unfashionable in a theatre which dots i's and crosses t's. Fancy has become a neglected stepchild of the Muses.

The gem of the evening was called "The Clown." Absent from it was the sketchiness,

the slight thinness of subject matter or setting which was apparent in some of the Russian improvisations. Improvisation is the mainspring of art, but in the Chauve Souris one had occasionally been aware of a slap-dash adaptation of means to ends a little reminiscent of those clever charades the So-and-so's organized over the week-end.

"The Clown" was a triumphant justification of compressed drama. It was complete in itself and its own defence, as a flower might be. The curtain rose to a mournful and passionate Chopin mazurka, disclosing a dark velvet scene, set on each side with bizarre hoops and barrels—a clown's equipage. Then the draperies parted at the back, revealing for an instant a glare, hinting at the arena's turmoil. Wearily a figure stole in, closing out that world beyond. Left to himself, the clown, for it was he, unmistakable in his red wig porcupining out in wild points and his striped pantaloons, struck a strange attitude of anguish. Then he gy-rated and tumbled gracefully about, but his skilled rhythmic movements were forgotten in

the amazing spiritual drama he gave us. A great mime, Mr. Kotchetovsky, who impersonated the clown; such despair one had seldom seen represented by gesture, such yearning for something irrevocably lost, such sudden, mad tumbling as if to forget grief—the grief of a rejected lover, of a starved worshipper of beauty, of a lonely performer for roaring and complacent multitudes. Mr. Kotchetovsky told us without words that the clown is the artist, he who feels more than others, and who, by some mandate of nature, of his physical and psychical constitution, is yet unhappy unless he reveals to the whole world his unhappiness. He is the exhibitionist. Sane men will laugh at him, proud men despise him. His arm is over his eyes, warding off derisive blows; and yet, outraged and ridiculed, he must and will to the high tiers of strangers perpetually give his last secret away.

The opening night audience at the Chauve Souris, although enthusiastic over much else, greeted "The Clown" with coldness. Possibly "The Clown" was a performance for clowns

only; but the disciples of normalcy should at least have appreciated the setting's suggestive beauty and the delicate and vibrant art of the dancer who graced this number.

The Chauve Souris deals in overtones, in evocation, in short cuts. Realizing art to be intensity, it stands or falls by a series of swift, unexpected impressions. Although capable of the graceful, the finished, the elegiac, it is not afraid of the grotesque, the violent, or the *naïve*. For the most part gay and ridiculous, it will not take anything, even itself, too seriously; its actors are as selfless as children joining hands in a dance; and one watches such perfect play, such imaginative rightness with a pleased gratitude.



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## MR. SHAW PLAYS JULIUS CÆSAR

MR. BERNARD SHAW'S method of writing historical drama has upset and infuriated certain people; it has amused the more liberal-souled and caused those who do not run but sit awhile, as they read, to ponder over his perspicacity. Crafty and courageous, he has discovered and put into practice the theorem that the best way of making the remote seem real is to discard verisimilitude. We are accustomed to see him shrug away, with the wild impatience of originality, careful accuracies of good taste, time-honoured trappings, all the musty paraphernalia of the grand style. Reducing his characters to the absurd, if that suits his humour, imposing on them the vigour and carelessness of modern speech, snatching away from them the stilts of blank verse and the pedestal of accepted grandeur, he brings them flatly down to earth with the cunning purpose of ultimately and in his own way raising them to the

stars. This is his method of attack in dealing with Julius Cæsar, as it is when he comes to grips with Joan of Arc.

"Cæsar and Cleopatra" is full of typical Shavian shocks and surprises, alternations of lofty thought and burlesque, sudden hand-springs and topsy-turvydoms. It is ridiculous and witty; it is also insidiously charged with a fresh philosophy of history, a discerning hero worship, a soaring common sense, and an inveterate mysticism.

Less magnificent an exhibition of understanding than "Saint Joan," less mature and tender, this play is yet full of imaginative and inventive splendour and incisive characterization. More, in the midst of its farce, it is abruptly and amazingly poetic. And finally, it is, except for a few overlengthy historical discussions, the finest kind of theatrical entertainment. Mr. Shaw, ever a sensible man of the theatre, is lavish with his melodrama. Trumpet calls, fleeing mobs, hairbreadth escapes from besieged places, incendiarism, and

at least two murders are the red blood diluting his grey matter.

These physical alarms and excursions give the stage manager his chance; the intellectual twists and turns provide actors with no less generous material.

The limelight centres on Cæsar himself. Mr. Shaw sees to that by endowing his hero with a super-consciousness as to his own characteristics and rôle in history. This is a favourite device which he frankly lays bare in the preface to "Saint Joan." "It is the business of the stage," he says, "to make its figures more intelligible to themselves than they would be in real life; for by no other means can they be made intelligible to the audience."

We have, then, Cæsar expounding himself throughout the play. His superb entrance speech, the address to the Sphinx, strikes the keynote of this self-exposition. And in one way or another he continues to comment on his own qualities—his quick wits and ingenious common sense, his fine workaday habit of action, his magnanimity born of a detached and



perhaps indifferent vision, and his half-wistful sense of isolation among men. What if one suspects the historical accuracy of this Cæsar's whimsicality and lucid reflection? Julius Cæsar played by Mr. Shaw is worth the price of admission.

"Cæsar and Cleopatra" is Cæsar's play. Cleopatra is a naughty kitten, a frightened child; her predatory seductiveness still in the bud, her appetites, ambitions, and celebrated managing ability only beginning to assert themselves in the awkward gestures of adolescence. She is a delicious, stimulating skit on her later self. The other characters are, as usual with Mr. Shaw, drawn in differing moods—and vary from the glorious caricature of Britannus, Cæsar's imperviously Nordic secretary, to the easy realism of such a personage as Apollodorus, the æsthetic patrician. Altogether, the play is an example of inhuman facility in every possible genre and is a hodgepodge of genius.

The Theatre Guild of New York chose this piece with which to open its new playhouse, on an April evening in the year 1925.

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The production was not without beauty and distinction; in particular, no praise could be too high for the loveliness of the stage pictures. Mr. Frederick Jones's settings showed the wide spaces of Mr. Shaw's imagination; they reflected his stress, in this play, on the stars and winds and elements—the power and sweep of nature echoing the power and sweep of character. The sets were significant and eliminated in composition; in colour lyrical and unexpected. Mr. Jones's Sphinx towered impressively against an opalescent sky; his palace columns suggested magnificence; his lighthouse on the island of Pharos was clear and white and bathed in real sea sun.

The performance of the play did not reach the level of its aspect and left a good deal to be desired. There were sharp mistakes in casting. The prologue, rewritten specially for this occasion, a historical meditation barbed with gentle insults to the American public, was declaimed by Mr. Albert Bruning with the dreary pomp and circumstance of a lesson in elocution. It missed fire pretty completely. The Cæsar

and the Cleopatra were both disappointments, although such minor rôles as Britannus, acted for all he was worth by Mr. Henry Travers, and Apollodorus, brightly indicated by Mr. Schuyler Ladd, were well filled. Miss Helen Westley as the fierce and comically pugnacious Ftatateeta had a part suited to her own tradition of an admirable dealer in the grotesque. However, she confined herself too strictly to humour and stressed too little the ominous side of the character, thus letting down Mr. Shaw's melodrama.

Emphatically, it was Cleopatra and it was Cæsar who failed to come up to scratch. Miss Helen Hayes, certainly too colloquial in inflection, got hold of the shrill greed and curiosity, the pert precocity and animal spirits of Mr. Shaw's Cleopatra; these she set forth with a good deal of precise energy. One was distressed, however, by the quality of her childishness, which was not spontaneous, but metallic and consciously cute. Nor did we gather a hint from her of the more pungent flavour which Mr. Shaw pictures as peeping forth from

the still callow Cleopatra; we were not impressed by any latent power of intuition or seductiveness. And so we did not believe her when she proceeded to tell Pothinus what treasures she had gleaned by an association with Cæsar. This Egyptian flapper was too knowing, too surely impervious to impression. There was no development in Miss Hayes's Cleopatra, which ended where it started. There was not enough richness in her conception nor variety in her methods of expression, although her work showed a sincere if limited intention and a correct idea of one aspect of the character.

Mr. Lionel Atwill, as Cæsar, began impossibly, with a depressing effect of heavily muted strings. His opening address to the Sphinx, which is, perhaps awkwardly for the player, the spiritual peak of the characterization, was thoroughly muffled. It lacked thought and fire. It was hurried, yet monotonous. Over this kind of a matter the actor should take all the time he pleases. Said as it should be and as it was by Mr. Forbes Robertson, this is a speech alive

with keen and curious poetry. Mr. Atwill seemed uninspired by the circumstance of this meeting under the stars; he gave no hint of Cæsar's clear-eyed melancholy before the too potent image of the lonely Sphinx. He carried this deafness to poetic overtones through the performance; and he was equally oblivious of the wise and rueful humour which makes this George Bernard Cæsar humanly great. Mr. Atwill was literal, solid, prosily facetious, when he should have been aristocratic, elusive, and lonely in his wit. His effects were obtained by the use of all too familiar rubber stamps. He was—and what could be more sharply disastrous in a Shaw play?—every inch an actor.

In the later scenes, where sudden humour and indirect philosophy are less apparent—more particularly at that instant when Cæsar in an eloquent burst of righteous indignation expresses his belief in forgiveness and clemency—Mr. Atwill was far more at home and managed a laudable show of force. His appearance was fine enough; his diction, in a performance marred by much slovenly speech, more

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appropriate than anyone else's excepting Mr. Ladd's. What his interpretation lacked was spiritual stature. Possibly Mr. Atwill's orderly mind neglected the more delicate shades of the character under the impression that they were only so many of Mr. Shaw's rather misplaced little jokes. He proceeded, at all costs, to preserve his own dignity, thus appreciably failing to convey the dignity of Cæsar. The net effect was that Mr. Atwill had omitted to think out his part and learned it more or less by rote. Since lines which have not been thought out are never listened to, where Cæsar should be there was a hole. This spiriting away of the chief character caused a collapse in the performance, which assumed a vague and shadowy aspect. Other members of the company became infected by the derelict haziness.

There was, then, a sense of uncertainty and languor about the whole production, although some vivid enough moments, such as the first entrance of Cæsar's legionaries and the delightfully played scene on the wharf. The lack of tone was mental and was not remedied by the

physical violence of the mobs. In fact, one was a little too conscious of the crowds, of their mass and volubility. They choked the proceedings. The pageant of cupbearers in the supper scene could, for instance, safely have been expurgated. This particular dramatist needs no such displays, which only blur the unparalleled exhibitionism of his lines.

Never mind. Out of the mixture of good and tolerable and bad in this rendering of his fancy Mr. Shaw emerged, as usual, triumphant. His light may be dimmed by an imperfect projection; it cannot be extinguished. We came away from "Cæsar and Cleopatra" grateful to the Theatre Guild for its effort in presenting such a play. A great play. A play which pricks us with a thousand points of unexpectedness, which sets us thinking by its unusual implications and new associations of ideas, filling us with the fruitful reverie which can only be induced by "that strangeness which is part of beauty."

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## THE PROVINCETOWN PLAY- HOUSE AND TAKING CHANCES

OF COURSE, one likes people who take a chance. The Provincetown group, with its little cellar theatre off Washington Square, during its career of several years, did a service to the community by bravely staging only things containing a certain æsthetic significance and by scorning the easy, the pseudo, the commercially platitudinous and comfortable and expected. Yet, many of its bills were handy illustrations of the perils that dog a Little Theatre's hopeful and experimental footsteps. Take, for instance, a typical evening's offering of several years ago; this was made up of Molière's one-act "George Dandin," translated by Mr. Stark Young, and a dramatic arrangement by Mr. Eugene O'Neill of Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner."



The "George Dandin" was certainly an ambitious mistake. To begin with, can Molière be translated? Knowing how discriminating a translator Mr. Young should be, then hearing the result, one concluded the fault was not Mr. Young's, but that of Molière, who, after all, must always be as rigorously, passionately, irrevocably French as an inlaid table by Riesler, a terra cotta by Falconet, or a modern bourgeois of Dijon, with his umbrella, his glass of Cointreau, and his belief that the United States is infested by "Peaux Rouges." Molière, in English, is pale, a modern pastel of "Le Pli Boucher"; he is formal, stiff, mannered, and quite a little arid. He creaks. We miss the fine, clean stamp of his language, the brisk certainty of his rhyme, his light extravagance with words.

And then how about Molière, anyway, these days? To be quite honest, even in French, wouldn't much of Molière strike us as, for all its ingenuity and wit, too bare, too explicit, too formalized, too—alas for ultra-sophistication!—simple?

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"So much the worse for us," you will say. Well, perhaps. But, anyway, these things no longer amuse us and we had better leave "George Dandin" on the shelf, unless we can not only revive it but revamp it. What do we mean by revamp? The Provincetown production of "Fashion," a would-be epigrammatic and moralistic society play written in 1840, was a good example of a piece transposed so that it could be enjoyed by a 1924 audience. In its presentation, it was commented on with wit and exuberance; from its antimacassars to its songs it was a glorious travesty on the period of its writing; so that, from never having been a work of art, it became one, because the directors of the Provincetown Playhouse practised, in staging it, the incisive art of caricature.

"But 'George Dandin'," you will say, "broad farce though it is, is a work of art to start with. Surely you will not presume to falsify its values?" No. But we might heighten them; we might translate them into values nearer our own, as Shakespeare was translated by such a

production as the John Barrymore-Jones-Hopkins "Hamlet"; as the mediævalism of "The Man who married a Dumb Wife" was gratefully lit by a modern slant in Granville-Barker's staging of it; as John Gay's "The Beggar's Opera" was underscored and vitalized and made ours by Lovat Fraser's asides upon it, in the shape of delightfully exaggerated costume, and by the portentous mood of its acting.

The Provincetown did not bridge the gap between us and Molière by any such modern comment. It did not relieve the *naïveté* of "George Dandin," which is a farce of much simplicity, although also, doubtless, a carrier of truth, of such serious, enduring themes as class injustice and unfaithful love. The *naïveté* should, of course, have been commented upon, by heightening it. For this reason, we approved of Mr. Robert Edmond Jones's set, with its mirrors and crystal chandeliers as *leitmotifs* and the house which was, like the eighteenth century itself, the most decorative and perfunctory and preposterous of façades. But surely the costumes, without costing more, could have been

more inspired—a certain anecdote might have been put into them and into the actors' make-up; the actors themselves should surely not have played the thing so almost "straight."

One ached for more surprise, invention, and persiflage. Obviously, the company at the Provincetown could not and probably would not act Molière in "the grand manner," the Comédie Française vein; a thing exactly studied in period, fixed, often enormously talented—often, too, in spite of everything, unrelated to us and incapable of holding us. Their only chance was to do what Mr. Jones did with the scenery—transpose the play.

Quite as much, from the commercial point of view, it was "taking a chance" to present "The Ancient Mariner."

"The Ancient Mariner" pretty nearly came off. Moments in it were as good in mood, atmosphere, picture, as anything one has ever seen in the theatre. It was certainly an experiment worth trying. Whether Mr. Eugene O'Neill, Mr. Robert Edmond Jones, or Mr.

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## PROVINCETOWN PLAYHOUSE

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James Light was responsible for most of its conception, one does not know. Mr. Jones, as scenic designer, must have thought out the lights, the darkly solid figures against a pale green cyclorama, all the really amazing and beautiful plastic value of the scene. For the group of drowned sailors, forming a chorus to the piece, was handled as sculpture, its black silhouettes posed with bleak meaningful effect against the sky.

Mr. James Light made the masks—dank-haired, plaintively ominous—which were worn by this chorus and also those used by such formalized types as the first two wedding guests, the bride and the groom. One's only criticism of these masks is that they should have been a little larger, extending lower on the throat and behind the ears, and that the actors should have made up their exposed skin to match the masks, so that the figures became more convincingly puppets. A greenish-grey face and a red neck do not contribute to illusion! Otherwise, the artificial faces were triumphantly appropriate to this sort of dramatic

offering; they were eerie, remote, inexorable as Coleridge's own fancy. The eye was supremely satisfied by "The Ancient Mariner." But there were flaws in the direction.

To begin with, the band of defunct seamen would have been far more oppressively telling if it had remained obstinately silent and a great deal less active in gesture. The business of having these mummers take up the burden of Coleridge's poem broke the charm of their lurid appearance. One would have liked their macabre frieze better as a sort of terrible dumb painted screen behind the Mariner and the Wedding Guest.

The Ancient Mariner himself, in the interest of unbroken mood, should have been required to recite as many lines as possible. This part cried out loud for an eloquent and passionate actor. One would have given anything to see Mr. Arnold Daly at it, or Mr. Alfred Lunt. Mr. Ballantine, admirably made up to appear in a grotesque and haunted frenzy, was, after all, a flat tire. His voice grazed the song; he persisted in marking the beginning of

each quatrain with the dutiful exactitude of a schoolgirl reciting "Lucy"; he lacked tempo, variety, literary sense, and was thus hampered in his attempt to convey the mystical horror and pity of the poem. The sober Anglo-Saxon power relieved by a certain touching Bach-like simplicity, which is the technical beauty of "The Ancient Mariner," slipped through his inattentive fingers. With a first-class actor in the part, capable of a sustainedly intense note, this production of Coleridge's poem, with its deep organ tone and crescendos, its terror and final, illuminated peace, could have been what the producers intended it to be—a poignant and suggestive thing.

Still, after one has with officious kindness picked flaws in their productions, the fact remains that one is permanently grateful for evenings spent on the hard benches of the Provincetown and other nights in the heartbreakingly remote Grand Street Theatre. In these places one finds sincerity, imagination, and instinct for what enlarges human consciousness. Fumbling there may be, but hands are grasp-

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ing at the stars. Elsewhere Lulu Belles may go on forever and Shanghai Gestures flourish even as the green bay tree. The experiments in the smaller theatres may emerge awkwardly, wilt away unnoticed, become only wistful memories. Yet somehow they dwell in the back of one's mind as beacons of hope flaring through the huge, awful and growing darkness of commercial commonplace and synthetic sensation.





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## REFLECTIONS ON TONY SARG'S MARIONETTES

ONE of Shelley's diversions, like a note of laughter interrupting the tense and tragic tone of his life, was sailing toy boats across a pond. We are told that he became a child when engaged in this palpitating occupation. Of course he did not become a child; he always was one. To a poet a toy boat is better than an ordinary boat, just as Deirdre of the Sorrows is realler than his wife. For, to such of the human race as have not only sought rest from ever-flowing actuality in the absolute of art, but developed, out of their craving for escape from fact, a passion for the impossible, toys are manna in the wilderness. No better toys have ever been invented than marionettes, because they belong to the half of art which is a flight from everyday existence; they are at the other end of the balance from the finished naturalism of Schnitzler's comedies, for instance, which be-

long to the half of art that is a sharp reflection of the perceptible.

Mr. Gordon Craig sees the future and the salvation of the drama in puppet shows; Mr. Craig is undoubtedly, temperamentally, a player with toys, which is a charming quality and also a romantic distinction, a sort of accolade bestowed by the more dreamy muses.

Mr. Tony Sarg, who has made marionettes the fashionable fad of the hour, has a very authentic passion for the fantastic, for the actual become formalized—in this case, minimized—away from any taint of the practical. He makes his marionettes himself, dresses them, paints miniature back-drops, constructs Lilliputian chairs and tables, cups and saucers, and even, sometimes, writes scenarios for them. He has the quaint humour of one who knows what wires propel personages to action.

He has worked, or rather played, over the art of producing marionette drama for years, and his performances are remarkably expert and careful in detail. Each puppet is actuated by many strings and requires a nimble-fingered

operator on the bridge over the stage to handle it, articulate its limbs, and speak for it. Mr. Sarg has evolved a brilliant technique in moving his figures about the stage, simulating voices, etc. But this any Belasco could do. What is nice about his theatre is the fancy he provides in it: the faces painted on his dolls which make them types as surely as Molière's comedy characters are types; the appropriateness of their costumes, in which there is always a touch of caricature; the use he makes of silhouette; the significance of his lighting.

Mr. Sarg's production of "Don Quixote" shows all the qualities mentioned above. Don Quixote, himself, has never been truer than in Mr. Sarg's figure of him, an intense bean pole, dolorous, grandiloquent, and noble as a gentleman by El Greco. In armour, on Rosinante, whose hock flexibility was peculiarly enchanting, he was the very shape of Cervantes' heart—hopeful, myopic, distinguished by his helpless idealism as by a Legion of Honour.

One wonders whether Mr. Sarg is perhaps

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not a little too ingenious. One's mind is so enthralled by the details of his performance, the opening and shutting of his characters' mouths, the credibility of their sitting down, that the spiritual meaning of the play they move in drops almost out of sight. Only once did the enduringly poignant symbolism of Cervantes bite in; and this was when the knight of La Mancha fell to one knee before the rubicund peasant girl wheeling her barrow, and, with a trembling reverence, proclaimed her the Princess Dulcinea of his dreams. A little doll then seemed to become another clutcher at the stars, a Keats, Chopin, or Dowson, imagining that, prostrate before the commonplace, they "follow some Helen for her gift of grief."

At other times the emotional content was spirited away by one's curiosity about the mechanical devices. The puppet will have to be, as it has sometimes been, more simplified, less likable and laughable—stiff, ominously non-human before it can possess the strangeness which is a part of beauty. This abstraction has been attained by Jean Cocteau in his ballet,

“Les Mariês de la Tour Eiffel,” in which the actors wore papier-mâché costumes that turned them into manikins and became as dynamic and portentous as the protagonists of Greek tragedy.



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## RUTH DRAPER

“CHANTERAI MA CHANSON.” In that charmingly independent phrase, which is carved on an old wall in Avignon, beneath the armorial bearings of a noble Provençal family, Ruth Draper might well find her own artistic motto. Miss Draper is now well known in this country as a distinguished monologist, and the very rare quality of her talent, which combines both creative and interpretive powers, has been recognized as it deserves.

Like Miss Beatrice Herford, Miss Draper writes her own monologues. Both occupy rather special niches in our theatrical hall of fame—niches not unlike the one universally granted to Yvette Guilbert who, in the dramatic kingdom, is neither fish, flesh, nor fowl.

Miss Draper is immensely gifted as an actress, with a fineness of expression as unusual as is her clear eye for reality. Her dignity as an artist is founded on the impersonal method

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## RUTH DRAPER

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of her acting, and one of her points of resemblance with the great Guilbert is the fine intellectual detachment she brings to her work. She has that delightful Gallic intensity for make-believe which we find in French actors; a quality which kills self-consciousness and carries everything before it, as all strong imagination is apt to do. Like Yvette Guilbert, Miss Draper has the faculty of transforming for us an empty stage into a roomful of people; or of turning a ball dress into rags with the quick twist of a shawl. This requires a power of dramatic imagination undreamed of by the average actress who is upholstered and sustained by scenery, costume, and appropriate lighting. I have seen Miss Draper convert a pine-board stage into a vivid "Street in Montenegro" just as I have seen Yvette make the stage of the Maxine Elliott Theatre bloom suddenly into a May orchard full of the happy sun of southern France. The resemblance between Yvette Guilbert and Ruth Draper does not depend only on this singular gift of *evocation* which I have mentioned as common to

them both—this faculty of creating for us with an inflection of the voice, or a lift of the hand, time, place, and people out of thin air. One can also discern in them a similar quality which, hidden from sight but ever vigilant, works “behind the scenes” as it were to create effects. This quality is good taste. By “good taste” I mean that rare sense of appropriateness which makes Yvette unbelievably vulgar in gesture when she is interpreting vulgarity, and which suggests to Ruth Draper just how she shall walk into the room when she is impersonating a “physical culture” teacher. The turn of her head when she is “a French actress,” her “débutante slouch,” and the tired forward thrust of her chin when she is a Maine woman sitting “on a porch”—these are all examples of her extraordinary sense of appropriateness. Such a flair for what is fitting is an instinctive quality, I am sure, and exercises almost unconscious control over the body.

While I may be depriving Miss Ruth Draper of a few intellectual laurels by stating my conviction that her sense of completeness, as ex-



pressed in the amazing details of her impersonations, is more largely a matter of instinct than the result of study, at the same time I am crediting her with genius. For histrionic genius is certainly this unconscious thing—this *guessing* at what gestures and expressions and intonations are correct and “right” for the moment—this splendid “divination,” as Arthur Symons calls it.

Miss Draper’s interpretative equipment is, then, of a quality very rare on the contemporary stage. Her plastic adaptability—her interesting mobility of expression, the correctness of her intonations, her almost uncanny felicity of gesture—are pure miracles to a lover of beautiful acting. When we reflect that her finish is not the result of years at a conservatory, as it would be in France, or even of long experience on the stage, but a spontaneous expression of her own intelligence, then we must give her credit for an immense amount of natural talent.

Perhaps it is a sign of her unique gift that she interprets best what she herself has con-

ceived. This curious and very real fact is what makes her, in the dramatic realm, a variation and a specialist.

As a creative artist—a playwright in a limited sense—she is to be seriously considered. How seriously, we can estimate by glancing at such a monologue as “The Maine Woman on the Porch,” which in itself is as concentrated and incisive a picture of New England life as “Ethan Frome.” Miss Draper has the rare eye for reality, the impartial, tragi-comic gaze of the born observer. One likes her freedom from sentimentality, her keenness of observation, and the sensitiveness with which she registers a “type” in all its completeness. To see “all around” character is given only to the great realists—to those who have the courage of acid pity—the Maupassants, the Balzacs, the Samuel Butlers. Miss Draper’s impersonations, which have this courage, possess the beauty of significant drawing, of bold and satisfying work done in a few strokes.

This selective insight of hers is what so

sharply differentiates her impersonations from ordinary "imitations." Naturally, her gift far transcends the bounds of mimicry. Mimicry is the reproducing of appearances. An amusing trick at the best, but of no more artistic value than a photograph, since it is merely uncommented repetition. If Ruth Draper only sketched off appearances she would be on the level of any music-hall actress who does "imitations." But she has the literary gift as well, the good short-story writer's talent for seizing essentials of character, the instinct for rooting out and reproducing the inner truth of what is inherent in human types. She writes us spiritual histories while we look, and deftly, and with the fine detachment of the creator, traces for us the mingled pathos and ridicule of a type like her "German Governess," or the gum-chewing pertness, the bravery, and the knowledge of humanity which go to make up the girl "On the Corner of Grand Street."

Miss Draper has also the short-story writer's sense of drama in a nutshell. In her "Scotch

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Immigrant," for instance, there is a tense little emotional scene full of a pathetic charm which one cannot easily forget and the artistic beauty of which springs from the very lightness and sensitiveness with which it is sketched in. Again, in that masterpiece of impartial art, "Three Generations in the Domestic Relations Court," which is the top notch, I think, of Miss Draper's achievement so far, we are shown with biting reality and a concentration worthy of the ablest dramatist, the tragedy of three separate existences.

Only a very little space remains in which to touch on Miss Draper's humour, which, since she is a realist, savours more of the trenchant and passionate art of caricature than of a more sentimental whimsicality. "The Class in Soul Culture" and the delicious "Board of Managers' Meeting" are simply incredible footnotes on humanity. Who will ever forget the honeyed and carefully modulated accents of the Soul Culture teacher as she earnestly advises a too robust pupil to refine her spirit?

That Miss Draper's monologues, with all their artistic importance as comments on life, should necessarily be so ephemeral, is, to a seeker after the really distinguished in American art, a matter of gentle regret.



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## THREE PLAYS OF A BY-GONE SEASON

WHAT is a good play? Many pages of analysis could be written on the subject, but the easiest and shortest answer is, "Outward Bound." As pure theatre (that alluring if æsthetically dangerous compound of sensation, sustained mood and fancy) this piece by Sutton Vane took precedence over all others, in a season, some winters ago, which gave us Shaw's common sense and fundamental idealism in "Saint Joan," Maeterlinck's fragile symbolism in "Pelleas et Mélisande" and the gigantic if vulgar scenic conceptions of Max Reinhardt in "The Miracle."

"Outward Bound" captured its audiences by the startling, simple vigour of its image: the dead, thinking themselves still alive, sail on a strange ship, outward-bound for an unknown port. That the boat in question should be pre-

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sented externally as the most ordinary kind of steamer, that the people on board should be familiar types, ranging from a clergyman to a charwoman, from a society lady to a drunken wastrel—all this was proof of the author's cleverness, of his lively sense of dramatic contrast. The play was written by some one very familiar with the theatre and its laws of effectiveness. It had suspense and surprise. Also, it dealt with common human hopes, fears and affections. Without being in any sense intellectual or particularly stimulating in its conclusions regarding immortality and the problem of reward and punishment, yet it contained emotional sincerity combined with a certain whimsicality of approach. We were prepared to find the wastrel well looked after when he finally reached "the other side," since he was generous and lovable as well as weak, but the scene of his final "assignment" to his mother, the forlorn little charwoman, was a completely touching moment, thanks partly to its deft and sensitive writing and partly due to the extremely fine playing of Mr. Alfred Lunt as the ne'er-

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do-well, and Miss Beryl Mercer as his mother. Mr. Lunt gave, throughout, an admirable performance, compact of mingled ease and intensity. He very justly conceived the character he assumed as one which, through its very capacity for excess, 'was extraordinarily alive, intuitive, and imaginative. Distinctly—and this in spite of Mr. J. M. Kerrigan's haunting rendering of the ghostly boat's steward—Mr. Lunt played first violin in the interpretation of this play's mood and message.

The cast was exceptionally good and the piece was staged by Mr. Robert Milton with a careful and delicate accentuation of the mysterious, hovering like a mist about what appeared to be the actual: the reassuringly life-like furnishings of the steamer and appearance of the characters being ingeniously blurred by unearthly lighting and the sirens and muffled drums off-stage. The only flaw in directing was the conversion of the society lady into a travesty—an alteration of the London conception, which struck a false and unnecessarily farcical note in the proceedings. Some cap-



tious critics were to be found objecting to Mr. Dudley Digges's burly good nature as the Examiner, the representative of an awful and almighty power. Certainly, we were all prepared for a stern, angelic and possibly winged being; it was part of Mr. Vane's theatrical instinct for giving us a shock, to bring out of his sleeve a perfectly commonplace if firm judge.

Although there was imaginative novelty in his theory that the suicide's punishment is a return to life, Mr. Vane presented no new moral problems, he did not write arresting poetry nor profound philosophy; but because he was human, tolerant, and above all a canny and ready man of the theatre, he made us travel quite breathlessly with his bewildered shipload of souls.

The "case" of Miss Zoe Akins is a curious one. Here is an author gifted with a quick dramatic sense and considerable talent for writing clever and sophisticated dialogue. Unfortunately, Miss Akins's sophistication—her easy assimilation of worldly or foreign cultures—

is oddly complicated and handicapped by a rather *naïve* romantic inclination. Clearly, she has what might be termed the "Camille" complex. From "Déclassée" to "Varying Shores" and "The Moonflower," Miss Akins exhibits her propensity sentimentally to "glorify" (if one may borrow from the Ziegfeld vocabulary) those who are not only fair but frail. Ladies of sins are portrayed as ladies of sorrows, according to the best Dumas *fil*s tradition.

In "The Moonflower," presented the same year as "Outward Bound," Miss Akins tried heroically to strike a fairly flippant note, to make the outlook of her Monte Carlo heroine light, sardonic, realistic; but as the play proceeded the author appeared to fall into the romantic and simple-minded state of her hero—a penniless student who makes honest and desperate love to the brilliant and experienced butterfly, the butterfly herself being pictured as melting, somewhat, in the general moonlight glow of emotion. Of course, young men do fall in love with and idealize unworthy objects; so, in her subject, Miss Akins was not

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far from life. Where she deviated from the straight and narrow way of truth was in her development of the idea; here there was no sharp sting of reality, nor healthy salt of life's inevitable commonplace. Beginning with comedy, Miss Akins early abandoned brittle comment and finally took to heroics as a duck to water.

It is only fair to say, however, that there was one moment of the play in which Miss Akins provided a new and quite possible twist, making a brief landing from the mauve atmosphere of romance in the demi-monde. This was when her hero and heroine suddenly discover each other's humble origin and proceed to discuss their youths with unaffected friendliness. But all too soon, this grateful and fresh touch of reality faded out and we were back again in the lurid and orchidaceous mazes of intrigue amid palace hotel high life.

The last act, except for the melodramatic interruptions of an inevitably royal lover's jealousy, was an undisturbed legato of soulful sentiment. In short, one hopes it is not too slangy

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to remark that Miss Akins's title "gave the show away."

Miss Elsie Ferguson as the heroine, although distinctly not making the most of her comedy opportunities, since she turned what might have been entertaining spite and irritability into something overemphasized and decoratively "tragic," did, on the whole, considering her past record, defend herself quite creditably against the temptation to slip into acute sentimentality. Her performance showed a certain real although superficial study of the "chic" and irony of this European type she represented; and in emotional self-respect, in normal diction, her efforts exhibited a marked advance and graduation from her stage work of the preceding few years—work steeped in an unreal and tremolo quality for which the movie studios were, one suspects, at least partly responsible.

Mr. Sidney Blackmer, as the romantic and impetuous student, was never for one moment either impetuous or romantic. This young player is severely muscle bound by unfortunate

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mannerisms, an irritating slowness of delivery, a lack of mental and physical agility. Until he overcomes this absence, in himself, of any flexible lilt, it is difficult to see how Mr. Blackmer can become, in the true sense of the term, an actor. The actor, more than any other artist, should possess the instinct for play. It has evidently not crossed Mr. Blackmer's consciousness that art is, after all, the most spontaneous, if the most arduous, of games.

"Fata Morgana," a Hungarian tragi-comedy by Ernst Vadja and one of the Theatre Guild's offerings during the season we are considering, should have been an object lesson to Miss Akins. The theme of it was identical with her own. But there was richness in Mr. Vadja's orchestration, other motives wove in and out of the piece—family existence, peasant legend, pastoral simplicity, fine old tradition. Here was the complexity, here were the varied voices of life, with its humours and steady affection and fierce, flaming desires, its wistful hopes and hidden disappointments, and its continuous humdrum, healing flow. There was keener

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beauty in these homely flesh tints, this broken pattern, than in the easy, oversimplified, pretty arrangement of painted wax work which is many an erring playwright's version of the drama as "escape from life."

The Guild, aided by Mr. Lee Simonson's discriminating setting and costumes, gave us the full flavour of the piece. Mr. Morgan Farley, as George, the boy who turns from his books to a first enraptured contemplation of woman in the person of his cousin's intriguing wife, Mathilde Fay, played with sincerity and intelligence. His straight, young awkwardness, his tentative idealism and unconscious passion, the bitterness of his disillusion when he realizes that "eternal love" has been, to the woman, a moment's amusing adventure—these were rendered with restraint and a fine sense of values. We might possibly, particularly towards the end of the story, have asked from Mr. Farley a trifle more variety in expression, since a certain rather literal simplicity was the only flaw in his performance.

Miss Emily Stevens, as Mathilde, seemed

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just about perfect; there was brilliant economy in her indication of the woman's experienced coquetry, her need of sensation, her determined, gay, ineradicable selfishness. Perhaps she might have, in the first scenes, presented a more seductive mask of tenderness, a softer disguise for her hardness, so as more deeply to justify the boy's headlong devotion and clamorous faith. But, taken all in all, her work in this rôle could with difficulty have been excelled by any actress in our theatre; it had definite line, knowledge, finality.

The minor characters were well sketched in by the rest of the cast, and Miss Helen Westley, as the gossipy female relative, once more exposed her happy and unusual readiness admirably to fling herself into the art of caricature.

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## THE MIRACLE

WITH weeks of preparation not particularly hidden beneath a bushel, with much extraneous social press-agenting, with our rather simple awe at foreign talent expressing itself in excited murmurs concerning Max Reinhardt and his innovations throughout the theatre—in short, with a more than adequate blare of trumpets, the “Miracle,” a giant spectacle founded on the legend of “Sister Beatrice,” opened on January 15, 1924, at the Century Theatre.

Except for the first and last scenes, where the supernatural tale, as used by Maeterlinck, was partially adhered to, “The Miracle” could best be described as decadent and tedious nonsense. It was modern German art at its most virulent, its most deformed, its most confused; and the mind that conceived it must definitely be classed as psychopathic. The twin obsessions of this mind appeared to be lust and



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death; a partisan of Mr. Vollmüller, the author, might retort that, figured as the devil and the skeleton, these were also the obsessions of the Gothic era which "The Miracle" illustrates. But the pageant conspicuously lacked the gargoyle intensity, the special, tortured, grotesque quality of mediævalism, that negation of the ideal which the painters and sculptors so sharply showed carries its own punishment. Here we had no baffled demon grovelling eternally below the feet of the Madonna; we caught no hint of a terrible revelation of sin, the dark and foul impulses of mankind groping towards a possible redemption. There were no deep shadows here and no shrill and ecstatic light. The period was badly muffed, or perhaps deliberately neglected.

To replace it, Mr. Reinhardt offered, in pompous emphasis and would-be originality, much of Berlin; something, in the scene at the Emperor's court, suggesting a sort of nightmare Ziegfeld Follies; a touch of Alice in Wonderland; and a photographic exactitude in Mr. Bel-Geddes's cathedral and historical costumes

which, curiously enough (as this scenic artist is an American) reminded one of Sudermann's and Hauptmann's Teutonic devotion to fact; to sum up, a distressing charivari of styles and intentions, exhibiting no central certitude, no belief or purpose, but rather a frenzied and whirling pursuit of the theatrical.

In this production, Mr. Reinhardt's one fine contribution to the modern theatre seemed to be the use he made of his audience; the spectators were surrounded by scenery; they elbowed the performers. This idea, familiar enough and derived from the Church Mystery or from the Elizabethan theatre, has potency and value; undeniably, it encourages illusion; by our proximity to the events that take place we are surprised, a little alarmed, and finally convinced of their reality.

But except for this clever throw-back to more *naïve* staging, Mr. Reinhardt's spectacle offered little of artistic worth. True, if we did not object to Mr. Bel-Geddes's photography—to the absence in his *décor* of that magnificent elimination which we found, for instance, in

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Mr. Robert Edmond Jones's setting for "Hamlet"—if we accepted his cathedral for what it was, a copy and not a creation, we might persuade ourselves to be impressed by its solidity, its accuracy, and the *tour de force* of its erection. We could also grant that Mr. Reinhardt and Mr. Bel-Geddes had thought out interesting and daring lighting, that the cathedral bells were sonorously convincing, that Mr. Humperdinck's music formed an agreeable accompaniment to the proceedings. But these are the only bouquets our honesty could throw at Mr. Reinhardt's feet. His far-famed handling of crowds seemed, for the most part, a reliance on mere size and mass as stimuli of sensation. The effect on the stage was generally one of overcrowding, of blurring: of fury, if not sound; this served well enough in the scene of passionate prayer to the Virgin and in the revolutionary episode, where a certain violence and turmoil were necessities; but the rest of the time one longed for design, for arresting high lights, for choice and tempo. Mr. Bel-Geddes's costumes would not have assisted a director who

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strove for composition and selection. They were singularly unimaginative in line and disappointing in colour; they were, for the most part, drably realistic without a hint of the exaggeration which a purely visual offering of "The Miracle's" type most urgently demands. Nothing so much did they suggest as a Yonkers High School production of "Robin Hood and His Merrie Men." Where Mr. Bel-Geddes attempted the singular and fantastic, as in the scene of the Count's banquet or at the Emperor's court, he achieved a lurid abnormality which was disquieting and, in the court scene, with its monstrous protagonists, induced that peculiar type of mental nausea which is furnished by the three-legged man or the bearded lady.

Possibly the responsibility for all this should not be laid entirely on him, but on Mr. Reinhardt and Mr. Vollmüller, whose conception of "The Miracle" so cruelly distorts and debases the original legend. The poetry and pathos of "Sister Beatrice," the nun who flees her convent under the spell of human love and returns to the fold many years later, only to find that

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her absence has been unnoticed and her sin forgiven, thanks to the Madonna's intervention—these were ruthlessly destroyed in this tasteless product which filled the nun's adventure with a pornographic interest, which substituted lust for love, sensation for emotion, and violence for intensity. Here was a presumably religious drama without beauty, or wonder, or faith; here was real desecration—a sin against the Holy Ghost.

The actors of "The Miracle," sensitive to the tone of the enterprise, were noticeably rather at sea; possibly they realized what a fraud was being perpetrated.

Mr. Werner Krauss played the Piper, a personage probably intended to represent the urge of life, the great god Pan, the glory and power and compelling adventure of the instincts, but in Mr. Reinhardt's conception lowered to an incarnation of sinister bestiality. Mr. Krauss, with a sound technical equipment as a pantomimist, but with an imagination more insistent than subtle, made the Piper vivid, converted the scene of the cripple's healing into the dra-

matic peak of the performance, and was the only member of the cast, with the exception of Lady Diana Manners as the Madonna, to achieve a clearly mediæval atmosphere.

One's sympathy went out to Miss Rosamond Pinchot, whose youthful good looks, energy, and sincerity had been enlisted in an unworthy cause. Since poetry and fervour were so thoroughly ruled out of this creation of "The Miracle," it is no great wonder that she should not have invented them for herself; a far more experienced actress would find difficulty in a rôle which is allowed no emotional development, but is sadistically petrified into a dummy of innocence crucified by brutality.

Mr. Schildkraut had, of course, a sure knowledge of the stage and considerable force to help him in his brief if volcanic part of the Emperor; as the Prince, his son, Mr. Schuyler Ladd exhibited precision of conception, both mental and physical.

Visually, the Madonna of Lady Diana Manners could not have been improved upon. Her beauty presents the rare phenomenon of being

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both delicate and effective; its refinement does not, as often happens, preclude carrying power. Her posing as the statue showed a knowledge of the Gothic spirit and a feeling for the tender significance of the figure which struck a refreshingly clear note in the midst of Mr. Reinhardt's murky symphony. After her descent from the pedestal, her movements were full of dignity and restraint; she has, to a high degree—if one may coin a phrase—the physical presence of mind which is gracefulness. Only if "The Miracle" contained the spiritual drama, the tragedy and tears and illumination of "Sister Beatrice," could one question the validity of Lady Diana Manners's Madonna and its stress on the decorative. However, there is little doubt that, given honester material to work with, Lady Diana could achieve a more poignant interpretation, since this player is obviously endowed with a keen and flexible artistic intelligence and an innate passion for perfection.

To return reluctantly to Mr. Reinhardt, he deliberately reduced mysticism to a pageantry



which was never noble and often clownish and he turned a motive charged with pain and searching and exaltation into profitless sensationalism. Dramatic values were butchered to make a Roman holiday of mere surprise and a deeply human legend became a libel. Out of this welter of theatrical hallucinations there emerged no touching or exquisite theme. But even at his own morbid game this director is no adept, as the monotonous introduction of the spectre of Death abundantly proved; what might have been a genuinely macabre apparition finally achieved, in its repeated appearance, something of the exact if nerve-shattering regularity of a steam drill. And finally, it is not entirely the temptation to make a bad pun, but a real conviction, which leads one to assert that the moving bushes—sliding about the stage and somehow evoking the croquet game in Alice in Wonderland—were certainly the most moving feature of "The Miracle."



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## THE VORTEX

THE advertisement on the jacket of "The Vortex," Noël Coward's play, which appeared in New York, both in book form and on the stage of Henry Miller's Theatre, assures prospective readers that in this piece of work they "will recognize the same urbane and polished note which they have welcomed in the novels of Michael Arlen."

Now, to some of us, Mr. Arlen's urbanity seems irritatingly similar to the interested urbanity of the headwaiter in a fashionable restaurant, while his polish is first cousin to the inestimable gloss on Rolls Royces and other expensive articles of the eight-cylinder, balloon tyre, shock-absorbing variety. Mr. Coward's urbanity is more nonchalant and less insidious than Mr. Arlen's, his polish is a less spurious and self-conscious quality. He is more good-natured, easier, intellectually better bred. Although he is dealing with the same limited,

hectic, and sophisticated set which enthralls Mr. Arlen, his point of view is saved from snobbism by his very real humour—humour, the aristocrat which knows no superiors, because it is a good mixer and treats all humanity as a peer.

Mr. Coward has written a play distinguished by the uncanny and diverting naturalism of its conversation, its light underlining of character, and its excellent dramatic situations. He is a master of that brevity which is the soul of dialogue. His lines are compact, colloquial, and deliciously likely. The same technique appears in the construction of his acts, each scene significant and plausible in itself, and yet leading gradually up to a sharp emotional climax. The end of his second act is especially remarkable for its original handling and dramatic intensity. It is not possible to quarrel with his equipment as a dramatist; his virtuosity is definitely established when his play comes to the stage and its superb acting qualities are realized.

When all is said and done, the theatre should

first of all be good entertainment and Mr. Coward does not fail in this respect. "The Vortex" is "a good show" and to say this about a play is never to hand out faint praise. Having registered gratitude for being so much held, amused, and perhaps affected, one may begin to pick and choose a little; to say that, in Mr. Coward's point of view and attack, one likes some things better than others. Mr. Coward is worth discussing and worth disagreeing with. He is brilliant and, on the whole, sincere. He is, often, an artist. One cannot put him in the Michael Arlen class. He is not a pyrotechnical, slightly dubious parlour entertainer. The danger for him lies, of course, in that direction. To write social comedy and not become smartly artificial, to be witty and remain honest, to brush in superficialities so that they shall be recognizable and yet to preserve a sense of life beneath appearance—only the great comic writers and satirists have managed to do this. For Mr. Coward's own good, one would like to see him develop the high, irresistible purpose which lies behind Molière's gaiety, Sheridan's

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gaiety—the biting hatred of sham and of the second-rate which is at the bottom of the true satirist's creative passion. To be a good hater is to be a good lover. And, after all, the mark of the artist is his emotion towards life.

Mr. Coward shows possibilities as an artist. He uses his humour, which is, incidentally, more a sense of fun than an epigrammatic wit, as a foil with which to tilt at the fatuousness of the people he describes. This is as it should be. He presents with irony, a cross section of London's fast set, pleasure-chasing, vaguely æsthetic, bored, rather lost. He draws a silly, pretty woman clinging to her vanishing youth, her lovers, the many-coloured expedients with which she fulfills her insatiable appetite for experience. He deals with her son, neglected, temperamental, talented and ruining himself with drugs in the attempt to escape from a reality which his upbringing and circumstances have unfitted him to cope with. Mr. Coward presents these people deftly, with amusing footnotes on the absurdities of modern, cosmo-

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politan existence and yet with an underlying, nervous fervour. His climax, when the son faces his mother and accuses her of causing his shipwreck by her years of self-indulgent neglect is frankly unbearable—in the same key as Hamlet's scene with Queen Gertrude.

And yet, if one is left uncomfortable by the situation, it is less because the play has to do with an "unpleasant" subject than because one feels, in the treatment, more hysterics than emotion and that the dramatist himself is a trifle fascinated and fooled by the frenzied rhythm of the very life he seems to deplore. Unconsciously, he has been gripped by some tentacle of the monster he depicts—"the Vortex" of sensationalism which is sucking down the overcivilized, useless society he describes. To write such a play is, of course, in the Freudian sense, an attempt at evading these perilous toils. Mr. Coward has, however, not quite made good his escape. To save his soul as an artist, he must trust less to his sensations and more to his heart. It is up to him to educate

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his sensibility beyond the ready-to-wear emotionalism of his big scene, which is exciting enough, but not so moving as it should be. If he wants to be taken seriously, he must strive towards some central poise and purpose as a writer, towards a reverence before experience which will bring into his work not only entertaining comment, photographic accuracy and "kick," but spiritual reality.

His observation, his sense of humour and dramatic instinct, are bright tools available enough to his hand. With these alone, he can write farce and light comedy, but if he is attempting to be a satirist or a realist he must work beyond the obvious, too easy sensationalism, as of the conventionally well-made "boulevard" piece, which forms the apex of his play. He must become clear in himself; above all, he must fight off, like the very devil, the temptation to be jazzedly cynical, sentimental about defeat and generally superficial. Otherwise, he will remain what he is now; at his best, brilliant, full of *brio*, inventiveness, and freshly

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humorous touches—amused and amusing—a playboy among the artificialities of high society. But he will not be poignant or true; and he will have surrendered his birthright as an artist.



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## BEATRICE LILLIE

**SHE** is slight, dark, erect, with absolute aristocratic control over her gestures, her nervous reactions, her voice, and features. She is boyishly thin, with a pert profile, a magnetism more important than beauty, a sudden smile that befriends everyone and eyes pensive with a wisdom which is too instinctive, perhaps, to realize its own tragedy. She is that lonely, unexpected, unbreakable thing—an embodiment of the Comic Spirit.

The more ordinarily dull a musical comedy is, the more she shines in contrast. Get her in such a second-rate, dog's-eared show as "Oh Please," her latest vehicle, and you will have an amazing exhibition of what genius can do with almost hopeless material. She glances through it like a meteor. She brightens up her co-players; she transmutes pedestrian lines and situations into glittering farce. And all with beautiful ease.



What strikes one, at once, is her difference and her ability. Where other comedians, male or female, are acceptable, familiar, and bourgeois, she is disconcerting as a streak of lightning, rare and distinguished. She is as much a heaven-sent alien as Charlie Chaplin, who is, spiritually, her only twin. Her strangeness and fineness are of the highest order; she is a gift from the inscrutable gods who delight in baffling mankind by granting it the shock of a new vibration and a new point of view.

As you watch her, you sense something exquisite in her organization, a unique intelligence which carries her through things that aren't at all her affair. For instance, the love songs and traditional musical-comedy heroine business which she has to shoulder in "Oh Please," in addition to her own particular vein of humour. She delivers this inevitable romance without the accustomed saccharine and mouthing; and she is simple and charming and satisfactory.

Always sensitive, always brilliant, she is courageous as a race horse and galvanizing as

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a live wire. She braces like a tonic or a swear word. She is sharp as tempered steel, pliable and indomitable.

She is cool, detached and smooth. She is insidious with a deceptive appearance of innocence. She dodges about and is elusive. Like every real clown, she is, for all her genial air of comradeship, secret and solitary. Put your hand out to sprinkle salt on her tail, and she just isn't there any more. She will beat you to it, every time. You shan't pin her down, label her or own her. She is, supremely, her own mistress. She is wise to everything and will, until the end of time, tell you where you get off.

Give up the attempt to master what she is all about and humbly sit back and enjoy. Gradually, if you become passive, you learn something. You gather that Miss Lillie has few illusions. You see her entrance in "Oh Please." She presents what was meant to be a conventional song—star with chorus. After two seconds, her attention wanders, her voice goes flat, her gestures are vaguely mechanical.

She is, you then perceive, laughing off the entire idea of musical comedy: its smart exactitude, its expensive artifice, its rose-coloured, powder-puff humbug. Her malice is quiet and inexorable.

A little later, she sweeps about in an oh, so feminine negligee with a train stretching practically across the stage. She gets so mixed up in that train, so muddled in archness and coquetry. Her sweetness is overpowering, her vampishness fierce and throbbing. And she has crucified once and forever the womanly woman, the whole paraphernalia and enterprise of sex appeal.

One remembers, too, her priceless moments in the past. The stilted lady singer of ballads, in a princess dress possible only in one of the more remote English counties, clutching roses, leaning with would-be airy grace against a pianoforte, smiling tightly, with the primal eldest curse of the amateur dreadfully written all over her. One remembers the pert and freezingly aloof cockney waitress in an A B C. restaurant. One gloats tenderly over the serv-

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ant girl impersonating her mistress, in a riotous scene, and referring to herself with ecstatic, clasped hands and upcast eyes, "*Wot a tray-sua!*" Never, as long as laughter exists, will one forget the "March, march, march" song in which Miss Lillie, glorious in blond wig, helmet, draped Union Jack, and with brandished spear, intrepidly intones a patriotic song—while a chorus of young women too energetically backs her up, interferes with her, masks her from the audience. Desperately she pushes these competitors out of the way; breathlessly she pursues the front row and the spotlight, the while implacably keeping up her song, her anxiety and fury betrayed only by an occasional sharp note and a swift, murderous glance. All clutchers after fame and gourmands of notoriety might profitably ponder that particular little comment of Miss Lillie's.

She is engagingly cruel towards pretence, sentimentality, and folly. Her humour is more masculine than feminine; pointed, devastating, and grotesque. It certainly is not concerned

with being becoming, soft, or gracious. She is a pathfinder and brightly hard. Her criticism is as savage as Chaplin's. She has the tenacious and ruthless common sense of the humourist; she pounces on human extravagance and delusion like a cat on a slow, silly mouse. She removes our foolish, complacent stilts with a turn of her wrist and leaves us sprawling, healthily brought back to earth. She reduces misty idealism and doting self-love to the absurd. She simply won't have soft soap, sob stuff, sweetness, and light. She is sane and relentless. And her ball dress in "Oh Please," draped in lines so classic as to suggest Worth, is made out of a tablecloth.

Her technique is perfect. Half of her comic effect is achieved by her quick, imperceptible shifting from a serious façade into some ridiculous pose or inflection. This is Chaplin's way, also. Her rapid, gloomy malevolence—her look which kills—reminds one of Charlie. Her alertness and the continual surprise she offers are like him, too. She is as self-contained, ingenious, and incisive as he. And she goes quite

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mad, every now and then, in his fashion. You bless her for this delirium which is as satisfying emotionally as a splendid orchestral crescendo.

With all her nostalgic baggage of divine discontent towards accepted mediocrity, her merit is that she is still forever a creator and life-giver. Her good humour is so good, so unfailing, so crafty at finding the word or gesture that will prick us alive by its novelty. She feeds us, gaily, with nonsense. She sings a song, precariously balanced upside down in the male comedian's arms. This is a symbol of the grand topsy-turvyness of her whole approach. We see life through her as through Lewis Carroll's Looking Glass—brightly. She throws things out of kilter, off balance, and, as Nietzsche would have it—revaluates values.

She is a rebel, an anarchist, a unicorn—restless, jocose, and upsetting. She will not let things be. Watch her say a line like: "We've been very busy lately—what with this, and what with that," and you will see how her exaggeration and oddity turn dross into gold.

She has nerve and conviction and an undying will to convert life into art.

Her refusal to accept life as it is, or rather as the common run of us make it, is as poignant as Charlie's. Like him she is remote, with the fitting pathos of originality, here today and gone to-morrow. Like him, she hungers for fresh fields and pastures new and must evolve her own shining universe because this one is all too stale and hide-bound and obtuse.

The crowds worship her for her perpetual translation, her perpetual escape. They stare and laugh and are aware they can never pluck out the heart of her mystery. They sense a subtle depth behind her gallantry, her polite fencing, and her wild foolery. Their eyes follow her about as if she were some blinding, bright light. And indeed, there is something translucent about her. What the French call "*esprit*" is really not so far away from what we call "spirit"; wit is a warrior, a surmounter of obstacles, a flame shooting through heavy substance. Beatrice Lillie's ridicule is so brave



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as to deserve a Croix de Guerre from Rabelais and Mr. William Makepeace Thackeray.

In her whole person and work there is a shy and steadfast purity, clear and resonant as her small, absolutely true voice. This purity comes from some integrity in herself, some implicit allegiance to her own vision, some smiling devotion to those difficult gods who, refusing to conform to the dull spirit of gravity, do, in a chaste ether of their own and over the muddy fragments of human buncombe and sentimentality, achieve a triumphant dance.

THE END











